

# Philosophical Consciousness and Christian Humanity

Five Contemporary Essays

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## CONTENTS

Prefatory Note	5
Contemporary Reflections on Christian Philosophical Consciousness	6
Knowledge and Faith	15
The Basic Truths	39
The Nature of Humanity	51
The Word of God	61
Feuerbach and Philosophical Consciousness	66
A Phenomenological Perspective on Feuerbach's Philosophy	80
A Monograph on <i>Laïcité</i> : A Phenomenological Perspective	92
<i>Laïcité</i> summarized briefly as understood in this monograph	93
<i>Laïcité</i> as a particular value in contemporary France	99
<i>Laïcité</i> viewed from a phenomenological perspective as a cultural phenomenon	106
<i>Laïcité</i> as an evolving political theology	111
<i>Laïcité</i> and the practical workings of its freedoms and prohibitions	117
Contemporary Ecclesiology and the Principle of <i>Laïcité</i>	124



## PREFATORY NOTE

This book is not a set of introductory essays. It has been written with the more seasoned philosopher in mind. And what I mean by consciousness is not specifically defined at this point but should become apparent as the reader continues with the text. However, I follow Leslie Dewart's general understanding of consciousness as a means of personal adjustment based upon the unique experience of a human being. He notes that consciousness as "human adjustment differs from the animal kind in that man's relations to his environment are mediated by a special kind of experience: the sort, as we have seen, that endows him with a sense of selfhood and a sense of reality."<sup>1</sup> In this book, I contemplate consciousness, or the sense of selfhood and reality, as a philosophical concept, not a psychological one. This avoids the bias of a clinical understanding often automatically presumed by many contemporary academics. That is to say that I write each essay from a different perspective of Christian philosophical consciousness. The first essay revolves around certain philosophical insights that have become evident during Vatican II. The second explores some of the thought of Ludwig Feuerbach with respect to the specificity of human consciousness. This continues the philosophical exploration of the Feuerbachian thought. And the fourth examines the French notion of *laïcité*, as a positive philosophical concept concerning religious belief as it relates to *Gaudium et Spes*, the "Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World." The fifth essay is an application of the preceding essay which deals with one aspect of *laïcité* abstracted from the notion of secularization current among Western Anglophone philosophers. Each essay pertains to the human existential experience in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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<sup>1</sup> *Evolution and Consciousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature* (1989:15) University of Toronto Press.

1. CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS ON CHRISTIAN  
PHILOSOPHICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Philosophical Consciousness in Light of Vatican II.

In this essay I reflect on some issues of the faith as they were introduced by Roman Catholic theologians immediately after the Second Vatican Council. In the “Theological Reflections” below I hope to throw some light on the two fundamental concepts of Christian consciousness which remained current after Vatican II (1962-1965) which are knowledge and faith. But first, I make a few remarks to orientate the reader concerning my understanding of the achievements of the Council. I trust that this background will assist the reader in coming to understand better my point of view within these essays.

The Achievements of Vatican II.

As expressed in the documents the deliberations of the Council are often difficult to follow and are written in a style quite different from modern democratic parliamentary literature and political discourse. The Church, in its Catholic and Protestant forms, by the time of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century had evolved quite differently from previous generations. The Church after the 19<sup>th</sup> century needed to address the problems of a new generation, or that generation would most likely leave the Church according to the mind of many of the hierarchy of the time. However, rather than abandon the Church, to my mind, the

“new generation” of the era is accurately represented by Gregory Baum’s “third man” as he explained below.

... there is “the third man.” Who is this third man? The third man believes that God has acted in Jesus Christ on behalf of all men and that this divine salvation is available in the Spirit in the celebration of the Catholic Church. The third man is a Catholic. He regards the Church as his spiritual home. He is deeply attached to the Catholic tradition. At the same time, he takes the institutional Church with a grain of salt. He loves Catholic teaching when it makes sense to him, when it gives him access to new life and enables him to respond to the demands the world makes on him; but if the teaching does not make sense to him, he does not bother with it. He does not wish to argue with other Catholics about it. It would not occur to him to argue with the bishops or the pope. If the teachings make sense to other Catholics, the third man thinks they should accept them whole-heartedly. Similarly, the third man loves the sacramental life of the Church. He participates in the sacraments when they make sense to him, when they deepen his awareness of God’s presence and strengthen him in his involvement with other people. But when they do not make sense to him, when they become barriers to worship and to community, then he does not bother with them. Again, he does not feel like arguing about it. He makes his own choice; he does not feel guilty about it. He wants to leave other people free to make up their own

minds. The third man, moreover, acknowledges the law of the Church. He is no rebel. He believes in law and order. At the same time, he realizes that human life is complex and that there are situations in which ecclesiastical law does not promote the spiritual well-being of persons. In those cases he feels free to act apart from canon law and, if necessary, move to the margin of the ecclesiastical institution.<sup>2</sup>

During the Council, addressing the problems of the third man was done under the guidance and with the power of the Holy Spirit as has been the habit from the foundation of the Church. The Church needed a plan of development that would allow it to adjust itself to changing cultural situations. It adjusted itself to the changing cultural situations through the Council. A new world context required of the Church new solutions for new problems. Succinctly put: the Church needed new skins for the new wine. Contrary to much contemporary theological opinion, the Church is not originally a European cultural product. Its Creeds were written by Asians and Africans, not Europeans. Yet, despite these universal Creeds, in practice ecclesiastical government has developed as European from the 5<sup>th</sup> Century onwards. Today, the initial understanding of the need for theology to reflect contemporary

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<sup>2</sup> *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis* (1968:200) Herder & Herder. Given the advent of the Internet since the Council and the dissemination of the world-wide sexual scandals in the Church since the Council, Baum's third man has removed himself further from the margins of the ecclesiastical institution.



society and culture that was put forward by the Council continues to evolve. In hindsight the faithful are aware of some development, as well as lack of development, in the theological, pastoral, sociological, and psychological insights proposed within the Council's four sessions.

The days of a State Church are over and it is doubtful what advantage, in the present time, the Church derives from this reciprocal system. In the ancient days of Church-State alliances, Church Councils had been convened by the Emperor for the purpose of defining new doctrines for the purpose of maintaining the union of the Empire. In our time, rather than new doctrines, Vatican II was convened to bring the Church up to date and to bring the reunion of Christendom closer to fact. In this process I doubt that the philosophical notion of Catholicity (a phenomenological notion) as opposed to traditional idea of Catholicism (a Hellenistic idea) was explicitly understood and appreciated by all the Council Fathers and theologians. However, a sufficient number seemed to be aware of the difference. In the Council's preparatory stages some officials of the Curia, not desiring any up-dates to traditional doctrines, attempted to manipulate the proceedings in their favour. Pope John XXIII referred to them as the "profits of gloom" in his opening address on 11 October, 1962 and the Bishops collectively wisely refused to comply with their constraints and inquiries were made among the world's Bishops before any discussions were undertaken or schemas proposed. This proactive move permitted the Bishops to set an appropriate agenda for the Council.

What is the nature of the Church? This question had to be addressed by the Council before the Church could determine its role in the world. The overall work of the Council was to determine the Church's self-understanding and relationship with the world. "Must church government be centralized?" was a fundamental question raised at the Council. Further, if decentralized, to whom would power in the Church be delegated, the clergy or lay members of the Church? The Council recognized that the secular media was a new factor in society. Even though the secular media had been around for quite some time its attention had not been focused on the Church to any great degree. However, the influence of the secular media was a significant concern for the Council. In fact, the Council acknowledged that revisions to Church government and proper relations with the secular press were needed in order to advance the efforts at Christian unity, and the proper understanding of the teaching of the Church. More recently, another "new" factor in society that has been recognized by the Church is the Internet, also known as the World Wide Web. It, along with a developing social media, have a "yet-to-be appreciated" presence in evaluating and disseminating the mind of the Council to a global social community of the faithful, as well as, the human community at large. In the minds of some phenomenological philosophers, they act through the presence of the new "digital citizen."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A website reads "My name is URL, I am a Digital Citizen," (registered April 23, 1997 as digitalcitizen.com). The site defines itself: "The Digital Citizen site embodies the true philosophy of the Internet: a global village of information, contacts, networks, and services free of boundaries and corporate

The four documents on the Constitution of the Church settled its self-understanding. It is significant that the Church has no single Constitution, as other political entities, but its constitutional polity is perceived as an organic unity of various human cultural experiences, rather than an ideological ordinance of union. Of its four constitutions, one concerns Revelation, one concerns Liturgy and two concern the Church, one as a dogmatic entity and the other as a pastoral entity. Combined, these determine the Church's earthly presence according to the Council Fathers. The interpretation of the constitutions within contemporary experience is the task of theologians and philosophers. Having determined its self-understanding, the Council then could discuss how to relate to the world around it. Such discussions sought to discover the salvific action of Christ which is at work everywhere in the world, even in non-Christian religions as the Decree *Nostra Aetate* has noted. The Council thus recognized that Christ's salvific action does not confine itself to the presence of Christianity.

As a conscious decision, the Council left moral judgments to God since its intention did not embrace a catechetical or polemical

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sponsorship. It is dedicated to provide each citizen the opportunity to communicate easily and effortlessly with others, be it around the globe, the country, the region, the city, or around the neighborhood. In essence, the Digital Citizen property is a guide to the world through the eyes of the Internet offering direct access to government and charity-based content, served up in a logical and friendly manner-all without the hindrance of advertising." In this sense the "digital citizen" is the WWW personified. However, a more recent phenomenological notion is the concept that defines digital citizenship as the self-enactment of the human organism's personal presence on the WWW using digital technologies to establish a sense of identity.

purpose. However, the Council did acknowledge that whether one speaks of the troubles of the Reformation, of relations with other religions, or secularism in the modern world, a substantial portion of the responsibility for past ecclesiastical failures rests with the Catholic faithful themselves. The decrees of the Council represent a conscious decision of the Fathers to fashion the political self-understanding of the Church to a social institution suited to the contemporary world. Their decision ultimately recognized that Christendom, as traditionally understood, no longer existed. The Christendom that ceased to exist in the minds of the Council Fathers has been well-described by Joe Holland, following his discussion of the classical paradigm.

The premodern or classical Catholic vision was, therefore, one of static tradition, fixed order, hierarchical rule, unchanging institutions, and transcendent sacralism, all founded on a mixed metaphor combining the biological with the hierarchical, witnessed to by a rock-like fortress. Body, soul, and rock all went together. This was the vision of Christian Civilization or Christendom.<sup>4</sup>

Catholicism continues to be replaced by Catholicity. The decrees of the Council (to be distinguished from its constitutions) may be divided into two categories, that is, the world and the church. They are the decrees on the nature of the world and the decrees on the nature of the Church. On the nature of the world, it was recognized

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<sup>4</sup> "The Postmodern Paradigm and Contemporary Catholicism" in *Varieties of Postmodern Theology* (1989:14) State University of New York Press.

that through scientific discovery that humans living in the present age have control over the processes of nature incomparably greater than at any previous time in history. As well, improvements in technological and social communications have revealed that the human race is, in fact, a global community inhabiting the earth for good or ill. This global community must consciously accept the responsibility for the future direction of development within the process of evolution, i.e., climate change.

The Council agreed that the social duty traditionally enjoined upon Catholics in the world is toward all humanity and not just Catholics. The Council reminded humanity that it had been created by God. Thus, the Council invited Catholics to reflect how their own failures of conduct or false presentations of their faith may have contributed to their neighbour's atheism. This acknowledgement represents a subtle shift in the philosophical perspective supporting the Church's mission. In its contemporary mission the Church acts as both the instructor and the instructed. In teaching others, the faithful teach themselves as they reflect upon their own Council documents. The Council also discussed the merits of a just war. It continued the perspective of recent Popes that war is a great evil but under modern conditions could not be waged by means that Catholic teaching would find permissible. But it is not by Catholic teaching alone that war is to be prevented, according to the Council Fathers. After acknowledging that peace is more than the absence of war, and the Church's efforts to avoid it, the Fathers state: "It is our clear duty

to spare no effort to achieve the complete outlawing of war by international effort.”<sup>5</sup>

After four centuries it has been recognized that Catholic unity, in the old sense of Christendom, is no longer realistic. The transmigration of peoples and the improvements in human communications offered Catholics an opportunity to share their faith on a level not previously envisioned. This was done in a way to make faith relevant to humanity. In undertaking this task, the Council built on social conditions already existing in the modern world. In this process of building up the Church in the world the Council recognized that the Church is scattered over the globe, rather than concentrated in a few particular countries. One may conclude that in the 21<sup>st</sup> and following centuries the Church will be in a situation different from any previous era which reflected Christendom. This new situation has given birth to a new philosophical consciousness suitable to the present times, as well as one that can be adapted to future times. However, to my mind, this new philosophical consciousness is, at present, an underrated achievement of Vatican II.

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<sup>5</sup> Flannery, Austin (1996) *Vatican Council II* “Gaudium et Spes” para. 82.

## THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

I have arranged the following Christian theological reflections under the following headings: Knowledge and Faith, Basic Truths, The Nature of Humanity and The Word of God. In them I have tried to disclose a philosophical consciousness which transcends the inheritance of individual cultures by discussing varying perspectives on these topics. I suggest that these reflections illustrate that humans are not necessarily bound to the ideas inherited within their particular cultures. New ideas are possible.

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## SECTION ONE

### KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH

#### Reflection 1: On Theology and Science

The correct parallel is theology and science, not religion and science as many less critical thinkers are wont to discuss. Nor are theology and science to be juxtaposed as alternative knowledge systems. They are complementary. Theologians develop thought systems which differ from one another in their philosophical bases, as do scientists. Some philosophers integrate the two systems constructing a scientific theology or a theological science. A similar phenomenon occurs in philosophy. Leslie Dewart made this distinction between Fundamental Theology and the Philosophy of Religion. Fundamental Theology is descriptive enough but overstressed theology, neither connoting its particular style of thinking, nor its historical situation is adequate. Philosophy of Religion recalls some of these particularities but lacks specific

reference to theology and to the preoccupations of this method of speculative thought.

Philosophical Theology has been occasionally suggested as a third alternative. ... I believe that *Theological Philosophy*, which is my own preference, may at least be as good as any of the more usual expressions, and I hope that this coinage will gain favour and come to fill a useful role in the contemporary Christian academic world [Dewart's italics]. <sup>6</sup>

Either system, theological or scientific, can only develop and grow into maturity given the trust of the individual thinker in the methodology of the system and subsequently with the trust of the community. Both theologians and scientists must trust the capability of their own systems to render the truth evident in their systems regardless of the context.

From the Christian perspective a divine object, i.e., God, cannot be known except through Revelation. There has been within the history of the Church a quest for the knowledge of God by reason alone, independent of Christian theology and faith. Pagan philosophers attempted this and their efforts did advance the contemplative and philosophical life, to some degree, in the process. For many theologians, contemplation invites them to discover the object of their faith through a *scientia*, or philosophy of the science of God. <sup>7</sup> The art of thinking which combines theology and science

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<sup>6</sup> Dewart, Leslie (1969:11) *The Foundations of Belief*, Herder and Herder.

<sup>7</sup> Concerning *scientia*, Cornelius Benjamin notes that "no very precise definition of the term is possible since the discipline shades imperceptibly into *science*, on the one hand, and into *philosophy* in general on the other" [Benjamin's italics].



leads to a metaphysical science of the mind, not limited only to physical experience. Edward Schillebeeckx has observed that:

In order to establish the concrete structure of theology and its distinctive methodical procedures, it is not possible to proceed from the natural data of what scientific work is, whether these are the data of the aristotelian [*sic*] scientific concept or those of the modern, positive, phenomenological, and “humane” sciences. The structure of revelation itself and the act of faith associated with it must suggest the type of reflection to which faith in Christ can lead. Only then shall we be able, at the same time by appealing to the human sciences, to throw light on the scientific structure of theology in all its many activities.<sup>8</sup>

Reason and experiment are the two foundations of modern science and through them the mystery of God can be reached through human trust which transcends the culture in which it first appeared. However, theology and science differ in kind and do not share the same metaphysical interpretations. Theology requires an inward subjectivity which is often opposed to scientific objectivity. (Although considering quantum mechanics, which addresses the behaviour of matter, the classic stability of matter is being challenged.) Inward subjectivity is a requirement for the critical investigation of human consciousness.

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Cf. *Dictionary of Philosophy, Ancient, Medieval, Modern* (Dagobert Runes, ed) Littlefield Adams & Co. 1963 s. v. Science, philosophy of.

<sup>8</sup> Schillebeeckx, Edward (1967:102) *Revelation and Theology* Sheed & Ward (Stagbooks).

Some critics would like to confine theologians solely to the speculative school of thought. However, the theologian is an adult who exercises critical thinking, whose thoughts are reflected upon, and whose faith, or trust, is analysed in an existential context. The mysteries of God are inaccessible without the light of faith, which to avoid the charge of fideism, requires the assistance of a rational process. When defining faith, theologians must presume a particular theory of human existence and self-understanding. And, in defining creation theologians must presume a particular view of the evolving universe and cosmos.

Western theology is not confined to the rationalism and philosophical methods of the ancient Hellenists. The Greco-Roman culture has not exhausted human reason, or rationality, which is a universal phenomenon common to all cultures. Through a combined theological and scientific system, the transcendence of human consciousness allows both faith and reason to receive the revelation of God.<sup>9</sup> Since theological/scientific reasoning transforms the content of faith from a personal and subjective understanding of the Word of God into a universal and objective expression of the Word of God, one may conclude that theology may be considered as existential science not necessarily bound to the constraints of culture.

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<sup>9</sup> There is further discussion on the role of God in human affairs in the essay on Ludwig Feuerbach below.

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Reflection 2: On the Meaning of Tradition

A tradition is a living transmission of ideas and practices, as the property of society, from one generation to the next. Tradition connotes the continual presence of the human spirit and a moral attitude. It is a continuity that expresses an ethos that is the fundamental character of a particular culture which determines its guiding beliefs. Tradition is the expression of that continuity which ensures the identity of an ethos through the ages. I speak of tradition only in the Christian sense, that is, the doctrinal or teaching purpose of the word of God. Today, tradition is often appealed to through the understanding of *ressourcement*, a return to the sources of an idea or practice. *Ressourcement* was a movement for renewal that gave impetus to many of the conscious reforms of Vatican II. This conciliar notion denoted a return to the sources of our belief and subsequent behaviour.

Philosophers and theologians attempt to open the future of belief to the spirit of renewal as they analyse the living traditions they inherited. A universal philosophical analysis becomes a question of the existential experience that transcends cultures, as opposed to a positive philosophical analysis, i.e., a Hellenistic one that determines the meaning of a particular tradition. Given their existential perspective, the Fathers of the Council never separate the subjective instinct of the faith from the objective content of the faith received from preceding generations, that is, its traditions. For them there is no question of an independent autonomy for the subjective,

mystical instinct of spiritual notions or entities. To be a human experience subjectivity must be embodied as an objective experience. Nor does the Magisterium, that is, the teaching authority of the Church, give an exclusively autonomous objective value to its traditions. All its values are subjectively relevant. Therefore, the subjective understanding of the faith must always seek to express an objective presentation of the truths, customs, rites, and behaviours, on which the Church agrees, as its living traditions.

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Reflection 3: On the Meaning of Dogma

Traditionally dogmas cannot be given a new meaning different from that which the Church has given them and continues to give them. The “prophetic light,” which is a message from God, came directly to Abraham, Moses, Isaias, Ezekiel, individuals living in the Old Testament era. In the New Testament era, the message came upon the Apostles at Pentecost, upon Paul, and upon John at Patmos, thus fulfilling the Old Testament promises in Jesus. The prophetic light is the first kind of light, i.e., Revelation, and is offered from outside human beings and it awaits their response. The second kind of light from inside human beings, i.e., theology is a human intellectual construction, which assigns meaning to religious experience. In philosophy the case is different and Dogma is contrasted with Mathema, in the ancient Greek sense of a qualitative form of knowledge which is subject to change. Mathematics, which

derives its meaning from this Hellenic term, transcends cultural expression.

I distinguish two forms of the reception of dogma based on the difference of the recipients of Revelation. The way in which Revelation was received by the apostles themselves is quite different from the way in which it was received by the Church contemporary with the apostles. I ask: What was the inward event experienced by the apostles? Inwardly the apostles received the prophetic light of Revelation, which showed them a higher way to understanding the meaning of Christ's mystery. Traditionally, apostolic revelation is accepted as complete and as being terminated with the apostles. As expressed in Edward Schillebeeckx's words:

Although the closing of revelation is not a dogma that has been solemnly defined, it has been universally accepted by the normal teaching authority of the church. This teaching is also closely connected with the doctrine about the unchangeable nature of dogma.<sup>10</sup>

The contemporary Church is expected to receive no new revelations from God. Further, the Church of today, despite cultural developments, is the Church of the apostles, (the Church of Christ), and I maintain that God's self-same revelation never ceased in the Church. The difference in reception throughout all ages is that the Church receives revelation according to its cultural needs. It needed revelation suitable to apostolic times; it needs revelation suitable to

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<sup>10</sup> Schillebeeckx, Edward *Revelation and Theology* (1979:63) Sheed & Ward (Stagbooks).

contemporary times, yet without dissolving the revelation of apostolic times. Thus, the contemporary higher way of understanding Christ's message of revelation is to recognize the redemption of the universe as an evolutionary process in the cosmos, the home of humanity, and as directed by humanity. In this process of evolution dogma changes as the human consciousness of selfhood and reality change.

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Reflection 4: On the Changeability of Dogma

In reflecting upon this question clear identifications must be made among progress in Revelation, development of doctrine and the history of theology. To my mind God has spoken more about divine intentions for humanity (a reflection of human needs) than on revelations of the divine nature (a philosophical impossibility). Humans seek in God answers to such questions as: Who are we? Where do we come from? What are we doing on the earth? Where are we going? Within Western culture reflection on these types of questions have opened the way for multiple currents of human thought ever since Christian experience came into contact with classical philosophy. Official intervention of classical philosophy in theology is evident in understanding the Trinitarian and Christological controversies as “new” perspectives concerning the “old” God. That is to say, new dogmas had been added to the understanding of the God of the Old Testament. By the end of the patristic age, the Byzantine East became indifferent to any further

philosophical developments at explaining the faith in rational formulas, i.e., the Creeds. What the West attempted to define through philosophical formulas, the East viewed as *theologoumenon*, that is, theological opinion subject to alteration contingent on the sophistication of the culture of the faithful. This lack of rational interest, from a Western point of view, resulted in a stagnation of philosophical development in Eastern theological thinking. After the first seven ecumenical councils, dogma did not change in the East.

However, after the Trinitarian and Christological controversies, history demonstrates that dogmatic and doctrinal development continued to evolve under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Though not without philosophical hesitation on the part of some of the faithful. I identify five historical and human “causes” of doctrinal and dogmatic evolution with the experience of the faithful. They are: 1) heresy, 2) theological reflection, 3) the piety of the faithful, 4) the liturgical life and 5) the Magisterium. All five causes are characteristic of human consciousness as to how they have been understood and interpreted within the history of the Church. Unlike the Reformers, Protestant thinkers began their own independent theologizing within an historical perspective from the time of the Reformation. Whereas, the Reformers maintained some connection with their Catholic heritage. The historical perspective of the Reformation, however, was not recognized as a context for dogmatic or doctrinal development by Roman theologians of the time. Their context was, in fact, ahistorical. However, to the

contrary historical interpretation has continued to play a significant role in Catholic theological interpretation up to the present. Protestantism, with its emphasis on liberal philosophy, has almost transformed Christianity into a mere religious philosophy. The historical development of Catholic thought can be seen in the words of the Council.

The spiritual uneasiness of today and the changing structure of life are part of a broader upheaval, whose symptoms are the increasing part played on the intellectual level by the mathematical, natural and human sciences and on the practical level by their repercussions on technology. The scientific mentality has brought about a change in the cultural sphere and on habits of thought, and the progress of technology is now reshaping the face of the earth and has its sights set on the conquest of space.<sup>11</sup>

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### Reflection 5: On Faith

Most humans, as a rule, question the faith in which they have been educated and brought up. Many unbelievers, however, experience more than an incapacity to believe. They consciously and deliberately cultivate atheism as a philosophy of life. The faith of Christians seems to these unbelievers and atheists to oppose reason and science. For believers God speaks to them in actions, facts and

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<sup>11</sup> Flannery, Austin (1996) *Vatican Council II* "Gaudium et Spes" para. 5.



events, that is, historically. God's word is unlike any human word in that it brings to pass what it says.

There are historical stages in revelation evident to the People of God who are conscious of God's presence. An initial stage was Abraham's mystical experience of the alliance between God and himself. Moses and the People of God carried this earlier alliance of Abraham's further, as did David, King of Israel. David's historical alliance with the Kingdom of God, or Reign of God, changed the relationship between the twelve tribes of Israel and focused on the holy city of Jerusalem. As well, each prophet made the changeable aspects of God's mystery explicit which were implicit in Israel's earlier history. Anyone who does not appreciate all the stages of Israel's history of faith from Abraham to Christ will read the Gospels, as well as the Old Testament, without grasping the profundity of all Christ's words and deeds. That is to say, faith has a history in the experience of the human community.

Through faith, truth is revealed as knowledge theoretically indemonstrable from that of rational or philosophical knowledge. Truth is the same in either case. The fact of experience as given to modern individuals discloses and confirms this distinction. Historically, the 21<sup>st</sup> century is witness to the rise of deliberate atheistic civilizations and cultures, not just individual atheists. From my experience, a possible advantage of modern atheism is that it may help purge superstitious magic from authentic religion, the former being the counterfeit of religion.

The first condition of faith, or trust, is to accept a dependence upon an order of understanding that is not philosophical, nor one that has been invented by the human intellect. Thus understood, for the faithful Christ's resurrection is not that of the mortal Jesus living again in a manner like Lazarus who was raised from the dead and returned to the life of his former existence. Lazarus' experience was, in fact, a resuscitation. In other words, the resurrection of Jesus does not originate in this world (in a physical experience), rather, the origin of his resurrection originates elsewhere (in a metaphysical experience). The resurrection of Jesus is at the centre of the conscious Christian faith experience because it completes the revelation of God, who from the time of Abraham, has been in an historical alliance with all humanity.

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Reflection 6: On Myth and Mystery

Myths are an imaginative means, representations by which humans have tried to express their knowledge of God, in order to escape from the limitations of a literal meaning. Whereas, mystery is the true secret of a God-given revelation given to humanity in the Old and New Testaments but not capable of verification. Since mystery is understood by some scientists today as a dubious type of knowledge, philosophers often ask: how ought we speak of God in our present day, mythically or mysteriously?

In the contemporary world we are moving away from the missionary colonialism that was once focused on the pagan

religions. Given their understanding of colonial history, contemporary pagans are not likely to reject Christianity itself, as in the past, but rather its western cultural form. Today, Christian revelation is understood by many theologians as fulfilling the natural desires of the pagan, or unbeliever, when he or she consciously seeks out God. The “fulfilled” seeker after God is one who is able to hold to a scientific approach in describing reality on one hand, and on the other hand, hold to a religious approach in interpreting that same reality. Many contemporary philosophers caution not to be overly impressed by those who claim that from the point of view of human knowledge it is impossible to establish rational foundations for belief in the existence of God. Clearly, scientific knowledge does not provide a method for knowing God. But it does present an opportunity for theologians to fashion appropriate terms of reference for belief in God’s presence. Contemporary historical criticism has demonstrated that there is much imaginary myth in the legitimate mystery of God.

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Reflection 7: On Christian Philosophy

There is a relationship between philosophy, as a formal discipline of human inquiry, and Christian revelation as a given to humanity. That is, for the faithful the person of Christ is the embodied source of projected ideas and principles of human origin onto divinity which subsequently constitute the supernatural quality of metaphysics. That is another way of saying that God’s revelation

of ideas and principles are those views and values in life which are recognized as specifying the human character since Jesus of Nazareth lived upon earth.

At their beginning Christians were content with Revelation as given in the culture of the day. The early apologists saw no need for a separate philosophy to explain Revelation. By the time of St Thomas, however, religious thinkers were more interested in the supernatural life than in natural life which subsequently led to an intellectual basis for a Christian philosophy with the merging of the two. With the result that in Thomistic philosophy nature must necessarily give way to faith should there ever be a conflict between the two. My conviction is that the notion of a Christian philosophy, resulting from a merger of supernatural life (i.e., faith), and natural life, (i.e., the discipline of human inquiry), <sup>12</sup> previously accepted throughout Western civilized society, is a dead issue which is unlikely to return to life. Leslie Dewart's observation is instructive on this point.

Vatican I's conclusion was the only logical one: it is a matter of *faith* that the existence of God is rationally *demonstrable*. Now, as a condemnation of fideism this teaching is unquestionably in line with the Christian tradition. ... But the upholding of Scholasticism was superfluous and self-contradictory. For there is no intrinsic need for the Christian faith to assume the Scholastic mode of philosophizing about

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<sup>12</sup> Recall Aristotle's quote in the *Metaphysics*. "All men *by nature* desire to know" [my emphasis].

God. And a philosophy that had become so impotent that it needed upholding by faith should perhaps have been considered more of a hindrance than a help [Dewart's italics].<sup>13</sup>

A new notion among philosophers has been recognized since Dewart's observation, i.e., that the supernatural life (metaphysics) and the natural life (physics) are autonomous, and both are subject to evolutionary development. As a result, some modern philosophers and theologians were attracted to a sociological methodology which is somewhat uncritical in nature and not explicitly deductive. This sociological methodology centred around the modern "soft sciences."<sup>14</sup> Analysis and imagination are less important in the soft sciences as a descriptive method. The legacy of this descriptive Christian-style sociology identifies a few points that seem to define Christian philosophy. These points need to be re-evaluated as to their ability to convince.

- A Christian philosophy is one which prepares for, or announces Christian values.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age* (1966:163) Herder & Herder.

<sup>14</sup> Talbot Parsons has noted that some versions of empiricist methodology in psychology have tended to treat "psychology not as concerned with the analytically defined individual, or a sub-system of him, but as the 'science of behavior.' Such a conception clearly makes sociology one type of 'applied psychology.'" *Theories of Society: Foundations of Modern Sociological Theory*, (1961) Vol. 1, pg. 33, n. 4. Eds. Parsons, T., Shils, E., Naegle, K., Pitts, J., The Free Press of Glencoe, New York.

- A Christian philosophy is one which has undergone Christian influence, and as a result, owes its formation to Christianity.
- One may understand philosophy to be Christian when it inherits ideas from Christian revelation.

To some contemporary thinkers, this sociological Christian-style philosophy may not be as tenable as previously supposed. Thus, the investigation to determine a Christian philosophy remains an on-going exercise.

Yet, some ecclesiastical historians suggest an independent, original Christian metaphysics to be a satisfactory answer. However, the awareness of a Christian metaphysics became clearly defined only after arguments began among the philosophers and theologians about Revelation in the the Church. Some preferred a biblical answer as opposed to a formal philosophical answer since the ideas expressed in the Bible are practical and differ from the theoretical ideas, characteristic of ancient Greece, India, Africa, and Oceania. In the minds of some philosophers who follow the biblical perspective there is the germ of a Christian philosophy in the making. The biblical perspective is a work of reason based on experience which acknowledges the word of God as interpreted sociologically. But this is not a Christian metaphysical philosophy, as such, since the biblical perspective is not imposed, rather, it is the outcome of an existential human social understanding.

The biblical existential perspective, which rejected the gods of the pagans, resulted in a revolution in the metaphysical, ethical,

theological, and political character of the pre-Christian order. Thus, within the Christian order, instead of a fixed and everlasting universe, philosophers became conscious of a perpetually renewable creation, which, in fact, is temporary and not bound by human cultures. The state of the problem had changed within the Christian perspective.

The supernatural goal of creation, that is, its metaphysical purpose, represents a fundamental shift that occurred in Christian philosophy. No such purpose is evident in the old, pre-Christian order of creation. The new Christian order shows this purpose in the divinization of human nature in the person of the resurrected Christ. To be truly divinized, humanity must possess the freedom to consent to this new status. Such consensual freedom is reserved to human beings.

Who were the thinkers who created the great systems of Christian philosophy in the Middle Ages, one might wonder? During the Middle Ages, the word “philosopher” meant the thinkers of pagan antiquity. At that time the word “philosophy” also had a wider meaning equivalent to wisdom, knowledge, and manner of life concerning one’s total world view. It had not yet taken on the identity of a professional academic discipline.

Philosophy engages reason, the human faculty of conscious discursive thought, even as it investigates the wisdom revealed in the Christian scriptures. The philosophy of the Christian medieval thinkers is part of their teaching on God, humanity, and the functioning of the world in general. However, they expressed their

opinions on these subjects without always clearly distinguishing between the theological and philosophical character of their thinking as modern thinkers have come to do. Clearly there has been an evolution of consciousness within the expression of Christian philosophy.

The medieval thinkers, as they encountered the works of the ancient non-Christian philosophers, did not understand themselves to be faced by a system of thought opposed to Christianity. Rather, their approach was that the works of these ancient philosophers should be made use of, but only as a servant or handmaid for the Christian perspective. As a result, any oppositional thinking that occurred within Christian doctrine, i.e., heresy, was corrected through the philosophical formulas based on classical philosophy. The Christian Creed, supported by classical philosophy, is a further illustration of conscious evolution of a Christian philosophy.

The recognition of a cultural Middle Ages is the period of time between the fall of the Roman Empire and the philosophers of the Renaissance who consciously resurrected the culture of the ancient world. In Western philosophical tradition, antiquity, the culture of the ancient world, is built upon hellenization, and modernity, the culture of the modern world is built upon the Renaissance. Christian philosophy, however, has its roots in antiquity, but its re-interpretation is in modernity. In short, modernity is a time of dehellenization of culture and philosophy and apparent rejection of the Christian ethos.



The eventual outcome of the hellenization of Christianity was the inward division of the Christian world into a believing church which ceased to play an inspiring, moulding role in the Christian world, and a world which is culturally Christian, but which does not as a whole, or typically, profess Christian belief. ... Both believing and non-believing philosophers have usually failed to find much *historical* significance in this event, perhaps because they have devoted more attention and effort to blaming each other than to understanding a phenomenon which is, when we come to think of it, fairly uncommon in the history of civilizations: cultures do not frequently repudiate the religion which brought them into cohesive being in the first place [Dewart's italics].<sup>15</sup>

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Reflection 8: The Basis of Belief

I address the question of belief from a perspective that does not rely on the professional schools of philosophy such as found in English-speaking universities. The Church is not bound to teach from within any particular philosophical system, even though the traditional approach for Catholic philosophers of religion is by way of Thomistic philosophy.

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<sup>15</sup> *The Foundations of Belief* (1969:115) Herder & Herder.

My general premise is that it is possible for the human mind to be vaguely aware of God, or supernatural presence, prior to engaging with any particular system of philosophy. And, for the possibility of belief in the case of unbelievers, I hold that it is possible to remove obstacles of a philosophical nature obstructing their belief in God. In short, I hold that serious seekers of the divine are capable of recognizing obstacles to the presence of God implicit in all human experience. I do acknowledge however, that some individuals in a state of arrested human development, may have experiences of a religious nature and this presents its own set of problems for the basis of belief. A suggested cause for the obstruction of belief might be that, in general, Christian culture has developed in the absence of a conscious knowledge of Christian history. Contemporary Christian culture has uncritically presumed what the basis of Christian belief is supposed to be. Such historical problems notwithstanding, it is the business of contemporary philosophy to explore the neglected basis of belief of all religious experience embodied in human culture.

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Reflection 9: On Theology and Science

Not until recently, that is, since the Enlightenment, has there been opposition between the human activities of theology and science. But it is now acknowledged that such opposition is false from a Christian philosophical perspective. As Vatican II taught, “by the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its

own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws.”<sup>16</sup> Both theology and science belong to the nature of the creature who is a material being, and neither discipline is Revelation in any sense of the term. However, philosophical difficulties still face the Christian believer who is a scientist, such as the autonomy of the scientific method, the harmony between the spirit of faith and the spirit of research. These concerns are not reserved to Christian scientists but also affect non-believers and all minds with a sense of spiritual values.

Contemporary scientists no longer present themselves in a closed system in which there are only certain facts to be learned, and knowledge previously acquired to be perfected. Contemporary science is rather seen as an adventure for the mind in new frontiers with new risks to be encountered. In contemporary science new problems arise and both scientists and philosophers do not know how to master them.

In the medieval period all branches of human knowledge were approached interdependently and their unity was conceived on the pattern of a hierarchical order of the subjects that were studied. However, the contemporary scientific method is characterized by objectivity, inter-subjectivity, and rationality. The scientific method enjoys an autonomy from theology and from the religious problems of humanity. But the scientific method is also related to the theological method since both share human construction. Religion

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<sup>16</sup> Flannery, Austin (1996) *Vatican Council II* “Gaudium et Spes” para. 36.

is, in fact, essentially characterized by a relationship of the human personality with the personality of God. Contemporary scientific knowledge pertains to a broad inclusiveness of humanity, it does not remain confined to the objective study of facts and laws. It also develops subjectively through reflecting on the nature of the human mind, thus making it possible for the human mind to fashion positive facts, as opposed to social facts, and laws.

The origins of contemporary science are to be found in the rise of mechanical thinking, whose basic notions are those of force, work and energy, all of which pertain to human action and aim to make it effective in the world. Within this background, some scientists profess Christianity, others are unbelievers. In either case the quality of their scientific work, like the work of theology itself, transcends the culture and human limitations in which they were consciously inaugurated.

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Reflection 10: On God and Reason

In Western philosophy the meaning philosophers assign to human existence depends entirely upon the solution they give to the problem of what it means “to be,” and to be a person, and, also the problem of being and nature of God. The philosophical conceptions of God, i.e., “to be or not to be” as a divine presence, are the result of a long process of abstract thought which are still being investigated. As well, there is the notion of philosophical conceptions being closely linked with the different forms of religion,

Christian and non-Christian which divide, or better, which are distinguished within humanity. But this is changing.

Those who are accustomed to modern western philosophy may be in for a shock as they move eastwards. In the West, both the content and the methods used in philosophy have become carefully defined. Many areas that were once seen as branches of philosophy have been divided off as separate subjects (e.g., natural philosophy has become “science”). As a result, philosophy has come to be seen as a discipline without a subject matter of its own, its task being limited to the application of rational thought to the presuppositions and arguments used in other subjects, analysing the language and the arguments presented.<sup>17</sup>

*If* there is a proof of God, it can only be a proof from the reasoning process and only expressed as a necessary conclusion from such reasoning, that is, a Hellenic philosophical approach. All arguments concerning God as a being are inadequate and cannot make God explicit in the conceptual terms of our human experience. Such arguments fail to convince the critical philosopher of God’s being or existence. They merely awaken the philosopher’s sense of a creative and imaginary presence of God. I hold it to be true that God, or its equivalent, does not appear at the end of the process of reasoning, but at the beginning of the process of reasoning, and is incorporated throughout that process. The image of the unknown

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<sup>17</sup> Thompson, Mel (2004:2) *Eastern Philosophy* Teach Yourself Books, (Hodder & Stoughton).

God initiates the reasoning process, rather than terminates it. This conclusion is possible only if God is recognized as being incorporated into the beginning of a reasoning process, and not presumed to become present to humanity through Christian revelation. The essay on Ludwig Feuerbach below may clarify this perspective more adequately.

## SECTION TWO

### THE BASIC TRUTHS

This part of my reflection is devoted to the presentation and discussion of the truths of eternal salvation (the proper subject of theology) which are the content of divine revelation. I focus my attention on specific aspects of divine revelation which are the subject matter of metaphysical philosophy.

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#### Reflection 11: On the Worship of God

Only selfless love allows humans to know realities beyond themselves. Further, only in so far as they recognize the Creator's rights over them can they truly recognize their own nature, at least according to the Christian point of view.

It is through worship that humans acknowledge their dependence upon God and enter into relations with their creator. Should they forget the command to worship, they lose their nobility as human beings. Without worship they end up living a pure humanism and only serve themselves by selfishly loving and helping others, and forgetting to worship God. Without worship, humans come to believe that true religion consists, not in adoring the God of revelation, i.e., the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but in devoting themselves exclusively to the well-being of others by drawing them closer together through a belief in humanitarianism.

The history of sacrificial worship begins with the offerings of Cain and Able in the Old Testament and carries right through to the life of Jesus in the New Testament. Worship of the crucified Christ brought the different acts of worship of the Old Testament to their fulfilment. And worship of the crucified Christ leads directly to the concept of the reign of God as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth.

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Reflection 12: On the Trinity

A Christian is not merely someone who believes in God. A Christian is someone who believes in God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This trinitarian belief distinguishes the Christian philosopher from the pagan philosopher who admits the existence of gods, but to whom the revelation in one God in three persons seems a return to polytheism, a belief in a number of gods. However, there is a difference to be noted in Hinduism, according to Mel Thompson.

Individual gods and goddesses exist in terms of their images, and also exist as representations of a particular aspect of life — but they are not really thought of as having an independent, disembodied existence. They are not located; they are aspects of reality, represented by their images.<sup>18</sup>

Some pagan philosophers had conceived of one God, but not as the unique concept of the Trinity. Only gradually has this trinitarian

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<sup>18</sup> *Eastern Philosophy* (2004:9) Teach Yourself Books, (Hodder & Stoughton).



concept of the mystery of God been conceived by philosophers. According to Christian theologians the nature of God as Trinity is a revelation from God and documented in the scriptures. St Paul's revelation about the Trinity differs from that of the synoptic Gospel writers in several ways. First, he is a convert. Secondly, he has a profound and immediate knowledge of the Christ. Thirdly, his message was documented in a milieu very different from that in which the synoptic Gospels were composed. Those believers to whom St Paul wrote had already received their instruction about the Christ. It was, therefore, no longer necessary to teach them. But, only to expose them to the full breadth of God's plan for humanity and lead them into the life of the divine persons.

John's perspective also differs. John's message was written to pass on to us the message that Jesus had come to reveal God. Rather, than merely completing the message of the synoptic Gospels, John wanted to share his own message with Christians whose faith he perceived to be in danger. The Gospel of John served as an instructional catechism for the early Church.

The dogma of the Trinity was eventually expressed through terms of human reasoning. This resulted in the many theological debates in the Christian East which subsequently were "settled" by Western philosophy with the promulgation of the Creed.

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Reflection 13: On Holy Spirit

Within the perspective of certain cultural insights of sacred history, I note the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit from pre-Judaic times up to the Christian era. The Israelites, being monotheists, never deified the sun, the winds, or other elements of nature in the way other ancient religions did. For them there was only one God. Because, in their understanding the wind, Ruah, is a divinely made phenomenon sent by God. It is God who is breathing a benevolent breath when the wind brings the rain and with the rain fertility. It is a malevolent breath when it brings hot winds and no rain.

Further, the breath of God possesses the prophets and supplies divine inspiration. With the arrival of the Messiah, it was as though a great wind from God, the Holy Spirit, had invaded the earth. The wind is no longer the visible and violent breath of God which enabled the Hebrews to leave Egypt, and accompanied the theophany on Mount Sinai. In the Messianic age it is the breath of life, a breath of holiness revealed to believers.

As times evolved, the theology of the Holy Spirit influenced other theologies and philosophies. There developed a theology and philosophy of the the human being as person, who is both subject and object, the philosophy (or psychology) of relationships, and the theology of divine relations, etc. All refer in some manner to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.

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Reflection 14: On Creation

The idea of creation belongs essentially to the category of religion as metaphysics, not science as physics. The theology of creation, like other notions in theology, has been modified under the stimulus of various errors which needed to be corrected. Errors about creation needing correction from a Christian point of view, are to be found in the ancient religious and metaphysical systems, such as pantheism, dualism, atheism, and materialism.

The Israelites, during their exile in Babylon, had to maintain their own faith against the ideas the Babylonians held about the world. Philosophers know what the Babylonians thought about the world and its origins through their poetry. Their story is one of a divine formative or organizing role for the divine powers, rather than about any creative and providential act by God in human history. The history of the Mesopotamian gods is a history of beliefs, politics, and gender roles. For the Babylonians, the coming into being of creation, that is, the genesis of the world, was blended in with the genesis of the gods which did not occur without some violent conflict and struggle.

The world of the scriptures as dominated by the transcendence of God is not truly the world of myth-makers and poets. The world of myth-makers and poets is a closed world. The Israelite believers, however, asked the same questions as the pagan, but a voice said to them, "Hear, O Israel." They knew that this was quite a different

world in which their worship on earth was not the magic rituals as found in the world of the myth-makers and poets.

Since creation, in the Christian sense, does not belong to the category of scientific reason, God cannot be an explanation for creation in any technical sense. God is not the answer to a scientific question and the belief that the world is created does not suggest any scientific truth. For Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the notion of creation belongs to speculative philosophy (i.e., Revelation) whose interpretation is culturally relative.

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Reflection 15: On the Problem of Evil

The problem of evil, as addressed within the notion of Creation, Fall, and Redemption, is philosophically insoluble. In Western philosophy evil is conceived within the framework of theology and its practical consequences assessed in light of Christian revelation. Contemporary Christian theologians distinguish between moral evil and natural evil, with the former being humanity's responsibility. Chronologically, the first exploration of evil was undertaken through myths, symbolic stories, popular renditions of epics, and the lyrics and tragedies of (pagan) poets. Lacking any idea of a divine government of the universe, the first seers, sages, and philosophers did not approach the problem of evil as the Christian philosophers did.

Within the Old Testament it seems that the first truth to be revealed was the relationship between suffering and moral evil. The

latter followed upon the former. Later, Christian theology, as a rational process, interpreted what was given in revelation. Theology had not always existed in the Church and its roots can be recognized in a variety of human philosophical perspectives. In the Church the first need was for salvation to be preached in the the form of the coming of God's kingdom, first to Israel, then to the nations. But since the first centuries there have been attempts at formal methods of exposition of this notion combined which later were combined with scientific and philosophical interpretations within various cultures.

Modern Christian philosophers make a distinction between natural evil and moral evil. The evil of wrongdoing is conceived as the result of a divergence between the will of a person and the will of God. From this perspective, the problem of evil raises several special problems for one's individual conscience. What is important, however, is that although one can voluntarily resign oneself to one's own suffering, for the Christian it can never be right to be resigned to the suffering of others. Within the Christian tradition, the problem of evil has never been fully solved and the tension remains between the intellectual understanding of the problem and the personal and emotional difficulties faced in an existential situation which is less than flawless.

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Reflection 16: On the Devil

Is the Christian, who is careful to believe everything that the Church believes and teaches in God's name, obliged to believe in the existence of the devil? Or, must the whole question be consigned to the indeterminate domain of tradition, legend, or Christian folklore? Since evil exists, does it need a "personal" identification as an independent and eternal rival to God? Can it only be conceived as one of God's creatures gone wrong?

The question of the devil is in the realm of theological conjecture and, at the same time, a doctrine of Christian revelation since the devil is no one but a fallen angel. The sin of the angels was never forgiven. The philosophical reason for this is that the presumed angelic intelligence is intuitive. Being intuitive, it never returns to things seen, nor reconsiders decisions once taken. In short, this means that an angelic intelligence is incapable of repentance. It is philosophically and theologically significant that the devil was banished from heaven, not from creation. Thus, creation needs redemption, heaven does not.

What in this contemporary age is the Christian position regarding Satan? Have the cultural advancements made in recent years by scientific discoveries affected human consciousness? One answer to the question is that there are certain philosophical and theological opinions that try to illustrate that the inherited God of Christendom is dead, and hence the devil is dead. They claim that

there is no God but the flawed gods of humanity itself, and their accompanying evil demons.

However, from the Christian perspective, the reason God permits evil in creation is that it is necessary if supreme perfection is to be ultimately possible, if not on earth, then in heaven. There is no necessity for God to permit evil, as there is no necessity for God to create. God's freedom, exercised in God's love for the world, is preserved in either case. The current question that arises from this perspective is, can belief in the devil, as permitted by God, be sustained given the current level of human consciousness and cultural development?

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Reflection 17: On the Theology of Grace

The nature of love, and God, and the Trinity, and the spiritual life are all incomprehensible without an understanding of grace. The Catholic idea of grace is essentially something which humans, whatever their merits or efforts, are incapable of obtaining by themselves. It is something which fallen human nature does not include. Nor does human nature in its fallen state claim that which is not due to it. Grace is a gift, not a right.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas Aquinas established a theological system as a coherent and comprehensive body of doctrine. Human intellectual activity, as currently understood, is not limited only to the formation of ideas. It must also judge the ideas that it knows. Among all animals only in the human, the *homo sapiens*, are

attitudes found that tend towards the good as known through the senses. But we do not find the capacity to will in them that which is good. However, humans have the capacity to achieve good works.

As a philosophical activity, theology is an effort of the human intellect to explain revealed truths, but not to prove them. The theology of grace, or the theology of the “gift” of God, links together all the formulas by which the revealed mysteries are expressed. These formulas attempt to remove the ambiguity of the divine will in the consciousness of the believer, regardless of the cultural context.

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Reflection 18: On the Incarnation

The Christian religion is unique among all the religions of the world in that Jesus of Nazareth, upon whom it was founded, was not only a man like the founders of other religions, but is also believed to be the very God who created the universe in which humanity lives. However, the Incarnation is not concerned with the life of Jesus of Nazareth. It is concerned with the Christ, the Messiah, as known from Catholic dogma and theology.

Theologians, Thomists included, give different explanations of the way in which the Christ exercised his free will on the occasion of the Incarnation. Some have thought along the lines that the faithful can conceive free acts in Christ based on his infused or his acquired knowledge. Others have preferred to stress the fact that Christ’s consciousness always enjoyed the beatific vision but that



did not deprive him of his freedom with regard to becoming part of creation, knowing of its fallen state.<sup>19</sup>

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Reflection 19: On the Communion of the Saints

In this reflection I note the doctrine put forward by theologians as it has been accepted by the official magisterium of the Church. Protestantism, however, rejects such doctrines as the intercession of the saints and purgatory and therefore has different definitions of the communion of the saints. I take a typical example from the Presbyterian tradition.

The early Christian community understood itself as a commonwealth of saints: each member of the church was made holy by their faith. All of us here today, by that definition, are saints — not the type who have passed through a variety of steps on their way to beatification, but, rather, simple ordinary believers — even the skeptics among us. ... If we open ourselves to the possibility — and this is hard for Presbyterians who tend to reside in their brains and not in their imaginative hearts and dreams — *the dead are mystically present with us*. That may not be easy for many of us, especially given the way we've been conditioned to view death, but when we speak of the *communion of saints* we are

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<sup>19</sup> The reader might profit from consulting Philippians 2:6.

acknowledging *the power of God's love to reach across the boundary between the living and the dead* [emphasis in the original].<sup>20</sup>

The Catholic position is that the communion of saints will reach perfection after the general resurrection when time comes to an end. Then the pilgrim Church will join that of the angels and Christ will return his kingdom to the Father. All created beings will then be gathered round Christ, the one mediator, and his Mother, whom he relates to his work and glory. According to classical Catholic theology, the Communion of the Saints will be the assembly of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins and all the saints, together with angels in their millions.

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<sup>20</sup> Westminster Presbyterian Church,  
<https://www.westminstermpls.org/2019/11/what-is-the-communion-of-saints/>  
[accessed 19 September, 2022].

### SECTION THREE

#### THE NATURE OF HUMANITY

This set of reflections is devoted to the study of humanity from a philosophical perspective. I focus my attention on the concept of the human being, its origins and the two constituent aspects of its nature, that is, body (physical) and soul (metaphysical).

#### §

#### Reflection 20: On the Origins of *Homo Sapiens*

Mythology reflects a concern for the question of the origin of *homo sapiens*. Philosophers, ancient and modern, have investigated the phenomenon of *homo sapiens* from an intellectual, or metaphysical, point of view. Modern science has sought an answer as well, but from a material, or physical, point of view. In studying the origin of *homo sapiens* today, the process of evolution, adapted to the human subject, must be taken into account. That is, the Western interpretation of the evolution of human thinking from primitive mythologies, to sophisticated philosophies, to the disciplines of modern science and mathematics, must all be undertaken with knowledge influenced by the Christian understanding of revelation.

With regard to the origins of *homo sapiens*, it is possible to distinguish one doctrine common to all branches of the Indo-European family of peoples, that is, the belief that the gods were the ancestors of humanity. Although I speak of Christian humanity, one need not restrict the search for the origins of *homo sapiens* to

Christian philosophers. These individuals focused on the origins of humanity as given in biblical revelation when philosophy was viewed as the “handmaid of theology.” As well, modern philosophy is being replaced, by and large, by techno-digital science in investigating the origins of *homo sapiens*. However, palaeontology and prehistory also need to be considered for an accurate understanding, when investigating the origin of the human species *homo sapiens*. There are two ways of viewing humanity. In ancient times thinkers usually regarded humans as a static and quasi-supernatural object of study. Modern thinkers, however, view humanity in its collective historical context within the cosmos as a species of the genus *homo* (man).

Just as philosophy replaced poetry and mythology in explaining the origins of the world and humanity, so modern science has for the last few centuries taken over this quest from philosophy. Contrary to the assertions of certain philosophers such as Auguste Comte and the Positivists, it is natural that philosophers and scientists, instead of confronting each other, cooperate in their investigations of the human beings called *homo sapiens*. Thus, contemporary science remains incomplete so long as its enquiries are not enhanced by philosophy. And philosophy cannot broaden its base without relying on the positive sciences and the social sciences.

The answers to the question of the origin of humanity given by ancient myths, contemporary philosophy and science, Revelation and post-Vatican II theology, cannot all be treated on the same plane. (None of these methods of learning were available until *homo*

*sapiens* appeared.)<sup>21</sup> For the Christian, both Revelation and theology, along with modern science, are sources of information in investigating the question of humanity. What the Christian faith teaches is that there can be no real opposition between these different planes, or between their branches of study. Mythology, philosophy, science, and theology are at one in accepting the appearance of humanity as a major occurrence within the the universe.

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Reflection 21: On Evolution

I distinguish between the physical and metaphysical systems of knowledge and between what is known and what is conjectured opinion in discussing the origin of the cosmos and living creatures, including humans. Contemporary scientists view the world via three aspects. One is cosmogony or the study of the birth of the universe. Another is biogenesis, or the study of the birth of life. And a third is anthropogenes combined with noögenesis, or the study of the birth

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<sup>21</sup> To my mind it is unfortunate, from an academic perspective, that Yuval Harari does not assign the role of philosophy a more significant status among the keys to the species *homo sapiens*. A summary paragraph illustrates the short shrift that he gives to the significance of philosophers. “Ever since the Cognitive Revolution, Sapiens has thus been living in a dual reality. On the one hand, the objective reality of rivers, trees and lions; and on the other hand, the imagined reality of gods, nations and corporations. As time went by, the imagined reality became ever more powerful, so that today the very survival of rivers, trees and lions depends on the grace of imagined entities such as gods, nations and corporations.” *Sapiens: A Brief History of Human Kind* (2014:32) McClelland & Stewart (Signal).

of humanity and of the mind. The theory of evolution is an intellectual construction attempting to retrace and interpret changes in the physical world as presented to the senses, either unaided or assisted by instruments. Not only do physical objects evolve, but so do metaphysical notions.

To include *homo sapiens* in the theory of evolution is to make it impossible to hold a strictly objective view of the phenomenon of evolution. The evolution of human life introduces subjective and metaphysical elements into the philosophical interpretations particular to them. The appearance of life brought into being a new appreciation of physical matter. Further, philosophers know, thanks to the positivist scientists, that the chemical molecules found in living things are far more complex than those that the chemist finds in inanimate objects.

The “cause” of the appearance of life in the cosmos remains within speculation. However, that the concept of eternal matter and eternal energy excludes all forms of external influence, is accepted by contemporary intellectuals. That is to say, eternal matter and eternal energy have their own autonomy and independent being. To the contrary, the concept of creation, unlike that of eternal matter and eternal energy, implies an assigned purpose on the part of a creator. In short,

the implication has been that, no matter what their efforts and achievements, *Sapiens* are incapable of breaking free of their biologically determined limits. But at the dawn of the twenty-first century, this is no longer true: *Homo sapiens* is

transcending those limits. It is now beginning to break the laws of natural selection, replacing them with the laws of intelligent design.<sup>22</sup>

However, some contemporary philosophers suggest that intelligent design is inherent in the cosmos itself, and without a designer.

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Reflection 22: On Humanity

Humanity, as a collection of unique individuals and self-conscious subjects, may be somewhat known through the phenomenological structures which disclose the human experience. As experience attests, no single, final answer can be given to the question concerning the philosophical nature of human existence.

The starting point for Christian thought on human existence has always been the first chapters of Genesis since it offers an essential impetus for reflection. Humanity is the meeting point between the visible world of the body, and the invisible world of the soul, the meeting place of time and eternity, as it were. Self-possession and self-mastery mean that humanity maintains its unity even if humanity cannot be totally understood through reason alone. This unity of self-possession and self-mastery is a prime characteristic of the study of humanity in the metaphysical (i.e., universal) sense. The universal sense is to be distinguished from the study of humanity under physical (i.e., particular) sense of the individual. Within the

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<sup>22</sup> Harari, Yuval (2014:397) *Sapiens* McClelland & Stewart (Signal).

theological perspective, an individual person is fundamentally constituted as being in a relationship with God, the creator, who is the person's source of existence. It is this relationship that ultimately constitutes Christian humanity. To my present knowledge, the brute lacks any consciousness of a knowledge of God.

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Reflection 23: On Life

Long before modern chemistry had demonstrated by scientific analysis that human flesh is composed of the same material as the earth, scientists had learned from direct observation that, from the moment life ceases to animate the material body, there remains nothing to distinguish the body from any other earthly chemical elements. Further, by the process of decomposition the body reverts rapidly to dust. What then is this dynamic force which endows clay with life?

“Life” is a word that illustrates what philosophers contemplate as phenomenon, of whose immediate cause and conditions, they are ignorant. The most striking characteristic of the living organism is its unity, the way in which every detail is coordinated to maintaining the life of the organism. Christian metaphysicians acknowledge that physical union in the animal species suffices to ensure the continuation of life. In the case of *homo sapiens*, however, the creative intervention of God is required within a particular cultural situation for human life to continue.



The Christian understanding of human life would be incomplete if it took no account of the knowledge derived from Revelation. Each individual person possesses a personality of its own, whose worth is derived from the image of the infinite being who breathed into it the breath of life.

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Reflection 24: On Personal Responsibility

Philosophy has, in the present century, changed the Western idea of the nature of humanity. This change imposes on the professional philosopher a responsibility for making the theories and findings of philosophy accessible to those who are inevitably influenced in some measure by philosophical ideas and notions. On a larger scale of culture, philosophy gives a person the means of expressing his or her humanity since it is the method by which one determines in large measure what one thinks and feels, what one likes and dislikes, what one may do, what one wants to do, what one is able to do.

Humans are born into a society that carries with it fundamental responsibilities with rights and duties to oneself and to others. What must be philosophically considered then is the philosophical and biological determinants of human action by examining the way in which value systems are consciously determined by individuals for themselves and for groups within cultures. Groups, who share a common mind, act as an individual presence with its own agenda within most cultures. Recognition of this influence of social groups within society requires a new consciousness on the part of human

beings. That is to say, the notion of human consciousness, or mind, as a *tabula rasa* in John Locke's sense is archaic and inadequate.

Scholars agree that Locke

restricted consciousness to the reflective apprehension of the mind of its own process but this usage has been abandoned in favor of the wider definition ... and the term introspection is used to designate this special kind of consciousness.<sup>23</sup>

Introspection, in the contemporary sense, is nothing but the mind's ability to conceive of a notion that captures the dynamic aspect of human experience. Introspective consciousness is but the examination of one's own thoughts and feelings in light of one's responsibility to an outside world.

## §

### Reflection 25: On Philosophical Systems and Metaphysics

Some modern philosophical systems deny humanity's ability to discover the absolute, historians give some evidence of the fact that humans are never without a metaphysical absolute. The main problem for the Western philosophical system is the problem of metaphysics and the need to define correctly its nature and function as an intellectual activity. Human knowledge is multiform. The history of humanity, as a collective thinking organism, illustrates that human understanding evolves and realized in a diversity of ways. No one way of learning has a right to disqualify other ways

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<sup>23</sup> *Dictionary of Philosophy, Ancient, Medieval, Modern* (Dagobert Runes, ed) Littlefield Adams & Co. 1963 s. v. Consciousness.

of learning. That is to say, physical learning cannot disqualify metaphysical learning. There are ways of knowing described as “poetical,” in the classical sense of artistic beauty, and “mystical,” in the sense of a direct knowledge of God which cannot be denied without denying centuries of human experience. Some philosophers hold poetry and mysticism as metaphysical and subjectively illusory. But if that which is metaphysical is illusory, then the illusion itself is real enough to constitute a phenomenon which must be philosophically accounted for and correctly described. A case in point is the concept of number; a number is a metaphysical concept which, of necessity, requires an objective referent to be really understood.

The paradox of our present-day civilization lies in the belief that it can survive without regard for the metaphysics of religion. Obsessed with technology, humanity has become the victim of the mechanisms it has fashioned for itself, but which it longer seems able to control. At the same time much of the the sense of Western human qualitative values and metaphysical understanding are being forgotten.

§

Reflection 26: On Psychical Phenomena

Psychical phenomena, as a type of energy, seem to imply the action of an entity superior to that of the person, or as that of some unknown factor within the person. The human mind, as either superior to the person, or mysteriously housed within it, continues

to search for the certainty of life after organic death through a speculative means.

This inquiry into psychical phenomena is not reserved to specialists but is open to anyone interested in the subject and its cultural expression and cultural interpretation. Within the context of the present day, no satisfactory solution has been found or worked out at this time, and a number of points needing interpretation must remain unanswered until further opportunity for proper investigation of psychical phenomena arises. From an evolutionary perspective, towards the end of the nineteenth century methodological research was sufficiently organized to investigate the origin and nature of certain paranormal phenomena. These phenomena were attributed to human energy of a kind, that up to this time, had not yet been identified. The investigation of paranormal phenomena continues less popular from point of view but from within a contemporary consciousness.

## SECTION FOUR

### THE WORD OF GOD

In this brief section I reflect on a variety of ways that the Word of God may be expressed and integrated into the life of the Christian living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Word of God is ideally reflected upon within the various activities and understandings of the faithful in the context of the historical period in which they were living. This enables the Christian to perceive the Word of God in all its dimensions. Also, the Christian is a messenger of the Word of God and a guardian of that Word who has yet to complete his or her work on earth. There are oral and written transmissions of the Word of God in the Church which have their roots in the Hebrew scriptures. The nature of God, the character of true religion, sin and grace, the call to holiness, discipleship, and the kingdom of God, along with other similar phenomena constitute the Word of God.

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#### Reflection 27: On the Bible

The Bible is a unique book in which all there is to say about God and man has been said, along with the Western theological interpretive tradition, so it is believed by the faithful. In short, there is no further new revelation from God, but only interpretation of what has already been given. But to link this book with Western philosophy and civilization alone is to falsify its meaning and limit its range. It is correct to envision that humans are indebted to the Bible for its role as guide in the history of the development of

humanity. However, in understanding and interpreting the Bible the faithful must go beyond its literal sense. The faithful must seek an allegorical and spiritual sense for correct interpretation. As well, understanding the Bible from the perspective of non-Christian religions is an asset. Or, in other words, the consciousness of the Christian faithful is not bound by their culture.

Through the course of events, modern ecclesiastical authorities have invited church scholars to focus on biblical criticism. Biblical criticism is a discipline undertaken within the Church in concert with theological investigation. This new discipline of biblical criticism respected faith and historical science even though during the Reformation many were scandalized who were ignorant of the true principles of the discipline.<sup>24</sup> Until the invention of printing, books were manuscripts and subsequent editions of them were given over to copyists who made various blunders and errors in transcriptions, albeit unintentionally. It was often impossible to go back to the original text, and errors were carried over from one copy to the next. The invention of the printing press generated fresh interest in the scriptures and comparisons were made among the

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<sup>24</sup> "The Pontifical Biblical Commission founded in 1909 by Leo XIII issued from 1906 onwards a number of decrees on controversial questions."... And as Joseph Schmid has observed: "If it is possible at the present time to note with good reason that Catholic biblical scholarship displays as new vitality, it is simply because it now enjoys a freedom of movement which it did not before, and can now investigate the manifold problems of the Bible and especially the revelation it contains, in their historical development, instead of merely providing *dicta probantia* for dogmatic theology." *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (Karl Rahner, ed) Burns and Oates, (1986:123).

various ancient translations of the Bible to an original text, and the mistakes that crept into the later editions were excised. Study of the deuterocanonical books indicates that at the time Jesus was on earth, Judaism was not closed and restricted to a Palestinian ghetto. Judaism's presence in surrounding cultures meant that early Christianity could reap the benefit of the Judaic influence within those cultures. Biblical criticism does not aim at casting doubt on faith as an act of confidence in the truthfulness of God speaking infallibly in the scriptures. Rather, it aims at ridding the reader of the false ideas which are often found in biblical interpretation.

Within a theological perspective, the people of Israel have lived through various historical stages in which the variety of human experiences disclosed the role which Providence had bestowed upon them. First was the experience of a nomadic life beginning with Abraham, followed by many stages of sacred history, (Heilsgeschichte), that ultimately culminated in a kingly stage.

The people of Israel had no particular philosophical system, no unique scientific approach, nor artistic heritage. That led to Israel's moral code being essentially a covenant morality comprising a dialogue structure that reflects a call and response pattern. Thus, Israel's experiences and moral discoveries made under God's guiding hand, oppose a fixed code of conduct, which is to say that the faith of Israel is not a Creedal faith.

There are various classifications of prophets in the Bible. They are identified as the Prophets of Baal, the Prophets of the Court, the Sons of the Prophets, and the Prophets by Vocation. The prophets

are heralds of a message designed to clarify and expand the terms of the Covenant. They presented the God of the Covenant as One, and in opposition to the pagan gods considered as non-existent. The ultimate understanding being that God alone governs world in cooperation with humanity. It is fair to conclude that the prophets do not merely affirm a monotheistic religion, as some philosophers are inclined to believe. Their affirmation is an affirmation of humanity.

Today, in the mind of some Christian philosophers, *homo biblicus* is being replaced by *homo laicus*, that is, biblical humanity is being replaced by secular humanity, which rejects the need for a transcendent God, and which claims mastery over its own destiny.

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Reflection 28: On the Sources for the Life of Christ

The evangelists do not present the Resurrection as a pagan myth. Rather, the events of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, as presented by the evangelists, were entrusted to the apostles who passed them on orally, and out of which the various churches constructed short homilies based on theological or liturgical issues. Eventually these homilies were collected and organized around theological themes and were put in writing as Christian cultures realized the Kingdom of God was not imminent. Christian consciousness then experienced moving from an oral stage to a written stage.

In their written form, there are three historical stages in the gospel texts. 1) The sayings and actions of Jesus of Nazareth, 2) the



moral, and apologetic controversies arising in the development of the Christian community after Christ, and 3) the theological purpose of the author(s) of the gospel and epistle texts. These three stages encompass the current philosophical consciousness of Christian humanity.

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Reflection 29: On Saint Paul and His Message

Paul was a man with an outstanding mind. He was a philosopher of the Hellenistic tradition, a man of action and organization characteristic of Roman genius, and a man of feeling like an Oriental master. Thus, it would be a mistake to study Paul's theology, metaphysics, and ethics without reference to the various situations in which he formulated his thoughts. He addresses converts, solves problems, and faces crises in the new Christian communities. Unlike the contemporary world of humanity, Paul's human world is not a secularized world and he understands all humanity to be "in Christ." There are various stages in his thought as evident in his writings. Without doubt the first morally significant stage is the meeting of the risen Christ on the road to Damascus which signals his change from a cosmopolitan consciousness to a Christian consciousness.

## 2. FEUERBACH AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

### The Philosophical Consciousness of Christian Humanity.

Ludwig Feuerbach is noted for his radical subjectivism. Therefore, I highlight his philosophical contribution to the consciousness of Christian humanity as disclosed in his *Essence of Christianity*. Given Feuerbach's insights many Christian theologians have altered their philosophical basis of interpretation. One such alteration is the philosophical contemplation of self-consciousness, as it pertains to a philosophy of the human mind which perceives, remembers, imagines, feels, conceives, reasons, wills, etc. The focus, or object, of Feuerbach's speculations was the phenomenon of religion, a phenomenon as far as I can tell, only evident in *homo sapiens*.

The contemporary phenomenon of the Christian religion has been consciously conceived from an antecedent series of intellectual beliefs called "theology." These antecedent beliefs to contemporary Christian religion may be studied from the perspective of the discipline of anthropology. And in Feuerbach's case, as I understand it, he has chosen anthropology as his approach to the understanding the essence of Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, to my mind, an investigation of his theological understanding reveals much about

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<sup>25</sup> "Only when we abandon a philosophy of religion, or a theology, which is distinct from psychology and anthropology, and recognize anthropology as itself theology, do we attain to a true, self-satisfying identity of the divine and human being, the identity of the human being with itself." (*The Essence of Christianity* p. 230).

the philosophical dispositions of humanity not always recognized by earlier philosophers. Fundamental to Feuerbach's theological investigation is his remark, "I change the object as it is in the imagination into the object as it is in reality" (*Essence of Christianity*, p. xxxix). In other words, what one imagines one is doing, one might not be doing. Further, for an object to be evident in reality, or as reality, requires human philosophical consciousness. In his own words, Feuerbach's work "is nothing but a faithful, rigid, historico-philosophical analysis of religion — the revelation of religion to itself, the *awakening of religion to self-consciousness*" (*Essence*, p. xli, Feuerbach's italics) Aware that erudition and philosophy are a means to the characteristics of Christian humanity, Feuerbach regards the species humanity, as a whole, to be the harbinger of truth, and not any particular sage, philosopher, or founder of a philosophical system. The sages of old are but the antecedent mouthpieces of Christian humanity.

My comments in this essay are based on the 1843 edition of *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by George Eliot, in which Feuerbach ends his Preface with these words:

My work, as I said before, contains, and applies in the concrete, the principle of a new philosophy suited — not to the schools, but — to man. Yes, it contains that principle, but only by *evolving* it out of the very core or religion; hence, be it said in passing, the new philosophy can no longer, like the old Catholic and modern Protestant scholasticism, fall into the temptation to prove its agreement with religion by its agreement with

Christian dogmas; on the contrary, being evolved from the nature of religion, it has in itself the true essence of religion, — is, in its very quality as a philosophy, a religion also. (*Essence*, p. xlv, Feuerbach's italics)

Thus, as “suited to man,” Feuerbach's new philosophy reflects a human consciousness, susceptible to interpretation through a Christian philosophical consciousness, which is tantamount to religion itself.

Feuerbach's Human Consciousness Through the Christian Lens.

Religion, as a phenomenon, is characteristic of human self-consciousness which in turn begs the question about the self-consciousness of the Infinite, that is, God. The brute seems to be unaware of its own self-consciousness and consciousness of God. A human consciousness, unimpeded by trauma or disease, acknowledges the physical and the metaphysical. These experiences are not acquired by one's consciousness *a priori*, that is, independent of sense impressions, but have evolved out of, and are differentiated through one's sensible understanding. This understanding of the physical and the metaphysical discloses a qualitative advancement in the maturing consciousness of an individual, and of the human species. Further, as the maturing of consciousness continued, the pattern became established that whatever is recognized objectively by humanity, has been first known subjectively by humanity. That is to say, humans come to know what a thing is before they assign the thing a name. The

philosophical problem for many becomes: is there a physical referent to the thing named?

The realization of self-consciousness and consciousness of another does not consist of two separate operations of the mind. Rather, the realization is one activity. That is, when one is conscious of an object, one is simultaneously conscious of one's own self-awareness. In other words, the human individual knows that it knows that it is aware of being aware. Or, alternatively, the individual is conscious that it is conscious. As well, this phenomenon applies to the human species as a collection of thinking organisms. Organizations and societies consciously enact rules and regulations defining themselves. This function of the mind when discharged at the highest level of the mind, that is, self-reflective knowledge is human consciousness. From a philosophical perspective, then, at one extreme the brute has limited knowledge of its environment, and does not know that it is a brute. At the other extreme, the human mind has potential for unlimited knowledge of its environment and knows that it has potential unlimited self-knowledge, as far as being tantamount to God. Such potential for knowledge specifies humanity to the degree that when contemporary humans look to the cosmos, they ultimately hope to find other beings, not less, nor different from themselves, but rather beings akin to their own nature i.e., self-conscious beings. Theologically from a Christian cosmological perspective, should this prove to be true, these beings also would have been subject to the Fall, and would have been subsequently redeemed by the Christ.

Within this pattern of unlimited human thought, one's consciousness of its object, and one's self-consciousness coincide. That is, philosophers know that they are philosophers and scientists know that they are scientists, etc. As evidenced in the stages of evolution, this phenomenon self-consciousness has disclosed the activity of science as an objective task, and the interpretation of science as a subjective, or psychological task. In the human species these tasks function as single mental activity, even though in practice they are distinguishable, but not separable. In other words, the human individual is not totally subjective, nor totally objective when it comes to defining its religious character. As well, the God of humanity is neither totally external, nor totally internal to humanity, yet somehow is distinguishable within, but not separable from, humanity. Specification as a religious animal is humanity's earliest philosophical means to achieve self-knowledge. Thus, the philosopher concludes, that in improving its religious understanding of God, humanity improves itself.

A conclusion of modern unbelief is that God cannot be defined and hence must remain unknown to humanity. This is not the *via negativa* of classical philosophy which is a theological formula of improvement through subtraction of all negative qualities from God. Although negatively expressed, it is a positive formula within Christian theology to illustrate the existence of God by focusing on what God is not. The *via negativa*, like "dehellenization," is a positive intellectual undertaking for the lack of a better term. Leslie Dewart faced the same problem and has remarked that it is "difficult

to find the logical name for that which dehellenization positively seeks to bring about. ... In other words, dehellenization means, in positive terms, the conscious creation of the future of belief.”<sup>26</sup> Modern unbelief, or better secularism, is simply disguised atheism, that is, an existential philosophy without divine qualities. Some humanist philosophers speculate that secularism has given rise to robotics which is the techno-digital scientific design and construction of machines (seen as a replacement for the divine assistance) to perform tasks traditionally done by human beings with the help of God. Previously, such help has often been expressed as “God willing.” Currently, humans perform tasks with computers “up and running.”

Viewed historically the progressive development of religion is indicative of the progressive development of human culture. In the construction of temples, mosques, synagogues, and churches, all the particular characteristics of humanity’s conscious religious architecture and culture is disclosed. However, Ludwig Feuerbach insightfully asks of religious Hebrews, in contrast to religious Jews, why they felt no need of culture. “Why had the Hebrews no art, no science, as the Greeks had? Because they felt no need for it,” he answered. To them Jehovah supplied this need for culture.<sup>27</sup> Although the brute is capable of constructing its own variety of architecture, birds only build particular nests, etc. There is no

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<sup>26</sup> Dewart, Leslie (1966:50) *The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age* Herder & Herder.

<sup>27</sup> *The Essence of Christianity*, (1957:216) Harper (Torchbooks).

evidence of their culture being recognized as a religious culture. However, certain human architectural accomplishments have been recognized as indicating a religious culture appropriate to the spiritual life of the community, and indeed to humanity. As a common human activity, the same elements of consciously religious architecture appear, to varying degrees, in every culture. The variety of these elements suggests that their appearance has resulted in the objective presentation of a subjective experience interpreted through the sensible world of a particular culture. In short, these objective presentations are fictions realized in this world depicting a consciously imagined other-worldly eutopia. These realizations are the stuff of classical religious theology, particularly Christian, which, I maintain, will be difficult to successfully import philosophically into a posthuman future. That is to say, the God of classical humanity may need to be replaced by a God of posthumanity as a requirement for any future Christian belief to be successfully imported into a posthuman future. From my perspective, a “humanized” God was for human beings; a “posthumanized” God will be for posthuman beings. This philosophical possibility seems to be on the horizon in light of Feuerbach’s insights.

To my mind, Joe Holland has identified five developments in the modern age that have indicated a “new birthing stage of postmodern culture” as antecedents to posthuman culture. They are, one, that the rapid developments in the modern electronic communications technology have altered speech, handwriting and print but has not



displaced them. Rather, “they are all reorganized under the leadership of the new form” of techno-digital science. He says, secondly, that “the scale of social organization weakens the dominance of the modern nation-state and moves toward a global/local symbiosis” in which the nation and state are not equal partners. This symbiosis may partially account for the perpetual revolutions in the nation-state political and governing system. Thirdly, he holds that the developing “miniaturization of the technology” will become increasingly economical and inexpensive making it possible to work from a household base of operations without the need of a factory. By way of example, he notes that “technological planners who have produced the incredible phenomenon of desktop publishing are already speaking of desktop manufacturing.” (The fact is that this book has been produced through desktop manufacturing.) A fourth development in the preparation for posthumanism, to my mind, is that “the new technology is simultaneously expanding and integrating all information, we are already seeing a new synthesis of natural, social, and spiritual information in the context of a holistic yet dynamic ecology of life.” I take *holistic* to mean an ecology of life that is greater than the mere sum of its individual constituents. The concept of a bionic human, the cyborg, is an indication of the trajectory of the new technology. Finally, he notes the effect of this new technology on contemporary human spirituality and suggests that “the spirituality of this society is increasingly the spirituality of *cocreativity*. We humans become aware that we are the

consciousness of the planet earth and to some degree the consciousness of the universe” [Holland’s italics].<sup>28</sup>

God-Consciousness in Christian Metaphysics.

Like attempting to construct an image of God, to construct an image of the mind is near to impossible. To construct an image of human consciousness or the mind, metaphor must suffice. In the person, mind and body are inseparable and are not able to be independently present, one without the other. In short, for human consciousness the physical organism requires the metaphysical spirit, or psyche. The metaphysical, i.e., God, has its origin in the physical according to Feuerbach’s understanding of human consciousness. The human being’s description of the metaphysical reflects its own physical nature and characteristics, but devoid of flaws. To be devoid of human flaws in a metaphysical dimension of reality, beyond the flawed physical dimension of reality, reflects an enhanced consciousness. Flawless reality is in fact the “other world” of Christian belief.

According to many philosophers of Christian belief, the doctrine of the Incarnation is a conscious and necessary metaphysical necessity fashioned by the mind in its interpretation of the experience of physical reality. The Incarnation is nothing less than the realization, or concretization of human “good works” in the

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<sup>28</sup> Holland, Joe (1989:106-107) “The Cultural Vision of Pope John Paul II: Toward a Conservative/Liberal Postmodern Dialogue” in *Varieties of Postmodern Theology* State University of New York Press.

world by another name. Thus, all humans are incarnations of concrete goods, albeit not perfectly so. The difference between the Incarnation of the Christ, often misunderstood as the Incarnation of God, and any other human is one of degree, not of kind. When incorrectly understood, the Incarnation leaves heaven empty of God as a result of the divine abandonment of the other world. However, as a counter measure Christian theology explains that it is the Christ, who became incarnated on earth, thus leaving heaven populated by God and the angels. In the Christian consciousness “good works” have become the specifying form of humanity. In the words of Feuerbach: “But, in fact, the idea of the Incarnation is nothing more than the human *form* of a God, who already in his nature, in the profoundest depths of his soul, is a merciful and therefore a human God.” (*Essence*, p. 51, Feuerbach’s italics) Which is to say that the Christian individual has consciously assigned human characteristics to God.

For Christian humanity, the doctrine of the purpose of suffering in life is a conscious and metaphysical necessity created by the mind through contemplating any negative experience of physical living. That is to say that suffering is posited as the mirror of humanity whose lot is to suffer in this life. The Incarnated God (second person of the Trinity) subsequently took on human suffering, or rather, from Feuerbach’s perspective, human suffering as a physical reality was projected by Christian philosophers onto a metaphysical reality whose incarnation was intended to alleviate, or at least compensate, for human suffering on earth. This purpose, of itself, is a conscious

religious activity characteristic of the Christian human being. Brutes appear to show no consciousness as to why they suffer.

For Christian humanity, the doctrine of the Trinity is a conscious and necessary metaphysical formula created by the intellect. As a theological conclusion, it is the logical outcome of the classical “cause and effect” traditional form of reasoning. Human qualities and powers, physically experienced separately, were consciously and philosophically fused into the Trinity as a psychological unity (not union). Again, this philosophical construction of the human imagination characterizes the human being. As well, the Trinity reflects a Christian understanding of the cosmos which, of itself, has no meaning.

Human consciousness of the physical world is consciousness of the limitation of human experience. Hence the projected human need for a limitless metaphysical world from the point of view of Christian theology. Characteristic of the German philosophical attitude, Feuerbach, expresses the need for a limitless metaphysical world in these words which, to my mind, prefigure the evolution of rational Hellenistic metaphysics to an existential phenomenological metaphysics.

Let the profound, speculative religious philosophers of Germany courageously shake off the embarrassing remnant of rationalism which yet clings to them, in flagrant contradiction with their true character; and let them complete their system, by converting the mystical “potence” of Nature

in God [a theoretical concept] into a really powerful, generating God [an existential concept]. (*Essence*, p. 93.)

For Christian humanity, the doctrine of Providence is a conscious and metaphysical necessity created by the mind from interpreting an understanding of physical reality. As Feuerbach notes in the Appendix, # 11,

*The idea of Providence is the religious consciousness of man's distinction from the brutes, from Nature in general.*

... General providence — the providence which extends itself equally to irrational and rational beings, which makes no distinction between man and the lilies of the field or the fowls of the air, is nothing else than the idea of Nature — an idea which man may have without religion [Feuerbach's italics] (*Essence*, p. 299).

For many of the pre-modern theologians and philosophers the proof of the providence of God was the witness to a miracle which cancelled the course of nature and suspended the law of necessity. With respect to the brute, it is aware of no provider except its own instinct and the experience that naturally belong to it. There is no reason for humans to think that the brute cannot provide for itself within its life-span. However, Providence is a human intellectual fabrication abstracted from the person's existential experience of not being able to provide, in an absolute manner, for itself. Providence provides a link to a conceived metaphysical world beyond the physical. This is a unique characteristic of human consciousness not shared with the brute. The tenet of Christian belief is that all things

exist for the sake of humanity, i.e., the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Humans are consciously set apart from the world as a specific creation who sojourn temporarily in the physical world. The doctrines of the Incarnation, the Trinity and Providence share a common status of being fabricated from an inadequate human experience and are subsequently projected religiously onto a higher plane of consciousness. From an anthropological perspective their origin can be traced through a critical examination of an inadequate human history. In short, their origin is not in any supernatural revelation, but in the Christian human psychological need for immortality.

The dogmas of Christianity are the philosophically realized wishes of the human psyche understood from a particular experience of what it is to be human. This understanding is expressed in the unique human psychological activity of prayer. Prayer is a pre-scientific cultural phenomenon that raises individual consciousness above one's own subjectivity to a universal realm of omnipotence. Through prayer humans characteristically leaves the physical world of reality for a metaphysical world of virtual reality. Humanity is not confined to nature as traditionally understood in the Western philosophical tradition, but through prayer humanity becomes conscious of its participation in the greater cosmos. Being part of the greater cosmos of human consciousness elevates the experience of the human instinct for self-preservation to a desire for personal immortality expressed religiously in the life of the Christ. This

desire is unique to the species *homo sapiens*. There is no evidence, to my knowledge, that the brute has a desire for immortality.

SOURCE

Feuerbach, Ludwig (1843;1957) *The Essence of Christianity*  
Harper (Torchbooks).

### 3. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON FEUERBACH'S PHILOSOPHY

This is an essay in philosophical existentialism (phenomenology) but without any definitive solutions of religion.

*Existentialism*: A philosophical current started in the past century by the Dane, Søren Kierkegaard, (+1855) and developed by recent scholars (Heidegger, Jaspers, Marcel, Abbagnano) in a variety of interpretations and connotations. ... For Kierkegaard (a Protestant) the tragic discovery of this real existence resolves itself in an appeal to the supernatural and, what is more, to an appeal without further ado to Christianity; but the other existentialists have eliminated this religious motive in order to stand aside in the *problematicity* of life and thought, and be free from the worries of definitive solutions. ... But it must be recognized that existentialism, with its realistic motives, has broken the spell of the haughty dreams of idealism and revived the problem of the individual life by spurring consciences to find an adequate solution [emphasis in the original].<sup>29</sup>

My intentions in this essay are three. First, to abstract the underlying existential philosophy from Feuerbach's religious belief. Two, to illustrate that Feuerbach's work is applicable to all human experience outside the German cultural context. And, three to

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<sup>29</sup> Parente, P., A. Piolanti, & S. Garofalo (1951) *Dictionary of Dogmatic Theology* Bruce Publishing, s v "Existentialism."



suggest that the insights of existentialism are a philosophical strength, not a liability, in understanding the human condition.<sup>30</sup>

### Feuerbach's Phenomenological Philosophy.

We are witnessing “the emergence of a new ‘mind,’ radically different in approach from the ‘modern mind,’ and already viewing the ‘obvious’ notion of Reality previously held as something antiquated and alien,” wrote Dirk Jellema.<sup>31</sup> I suggest that Feuerbach's philosophical perspective is an example of this new radically different mind that attempts to understand experience without the assistance of previously held religious convictions. In short, I suggest that Feuerbach was a phenomenological thinker. Further, Lowe observes: “We are so accustomed to philosophizing from an extrinsic standpoint, whether Cartesian or Platonic, that we can no longer comprehend the phenomenological standpoint within the world”<sup>32</sup> Feuerbach's philosophy helps us to de-familiarize ourselves with Cartesian and Platonic thought forms and introduces a phenomenological approach.

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<sup>30</sup> The title of Feuerbach's book notwithstanding, to Feuerbach's way of thinking, God is not an object for philosophy. “God, as the object of religion, — and only as such is he God, — God in the sense of a *nomen proprium*, not of a vague, metaphysical entity, is essentially an object only of religion, not of philosophy” (*Essence of Christianity* Harper Torchbooks (1957:186). *Nomen proprium*, translated “proper noun,” in its primary application refers to a unique entity.

<sup>31</sup> Jellema, Dirk (1963:81) Toward Investigating the ‘post-modern mind.’ A Working Paper in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 3, 81-85.

<sup>32</sup> Lowe, D. M. (1982:165) *History of Bourgeois Perception* University of Chicago Press.

In classical thinking, theoretical questions and answers are governed by a fixed idea of Nature. Moreover, truth expressed in theoretical terms has become fixed in a particular form of expression that itself is perceived to be as valid as the truth. Researchers, not aware of this aberration whereby the means have become idealized ends (goals), make interpretive mistakes. Feuerbach's phenomenological "non-fixity" conceived in the mind's understanding helps us avoid the interpretive mistakes of idealistic philosophers. In phenomenological philosophical interpretation, being is understood as becoming, unity is understood as relational, and necessity is replaced by option. These notions are easily recognizable in Feuerbach's philosophy.

As Western culture continues to evolve, traditional conceptualization becomes increasingly less helpful. Sokolowski, after an exposé of the limitations of conventional descriptions, offers his understanding of a new knowledge. He discusses phenomenological knowledge. "What we are seeking, without perhaps being fully aware of it, is not so much improved science, or more science, but a different idiom for living, a different idiom for our interaction with nature and cosmos"<sup>33</sup>

Phenomenological thinking, which is an existential understanding concerning human experience, underscores Feuerbach's thought. Phenomenological thinking has developed independently and, in many cases, in opposition to classical

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<sup>33</sup> Sokolowski, R. (1974:36) *Husserlian Meditations: How Words Present Things* Northwestern University Press.

philosophy and theology <sup>34</sup> Development in phenomenological thinking is continually taking place, and the Western hermeneutic is seeking to end its “cultural provincialism” and provide a new threshold of interpretation. <sup>35</sup> In short, we cannot live with the fossilized thresholds of old ideas that the human mind has fashioned out of past experience. Feuerbach’s philosophy assists in ending the “cultural provincialism” of ancient philosophical systems.

Feuerbach concentrated his attention on mankind in his philosophy and articulated it by way of a phenomenological approach to life. Feuerbach’s philosophy constructs eidetic objects. Eidetic objects, as phenomena, have no existence outside the mind, ideal or otherwise. <sup>36</sup> These eidetic notions, are fictions that indicate a change in the perspective of an individual, which are capable of study in light of Feuerbach’s philosophy.

Traditional Western analytical interpretation maintains that there must be some cause existing independently behind all effects. Discussing modern developments in the cognitive sciences, Searle points out an assumption within rationalist thinking which many find no longer tests as true. This assumption “goes as far back as Leibnitz and probably as far as Plato. It is the assumption that a

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<sup>34</sup> Kroner, R. (1951) *Culture and Faith*. University of Chicago Press.

<sup>35</sup> Tracy, D. (1988:56) “Theology and the Hermeneutical Turn” in D. O. Dahlstrom (Ed.) *Hermeneutics and the Tradition* (46-57) American Catholic Philosophical Association.

<sup>36</sup> Ryba, T. (1991) *The Essence of Phenomenology and its Meaning for the Scientific Study of Religion* Peter Lang.

mental achievement must have theoretical causes.”<sup>37</sup> However, this is not so with Feuerbach’s philosophy. He does not rely on classical understanding. Rather, his phenomenological interpretation suggests an alternative direction in which human philosophical development may occur.

Since Feuerbach’s thinking is not determined by pre-existing theoretical causes it presents as a new threshold of understanding. Feuerbach’s philosophy as a phenomenological methodology, possesses no past or future that concretely exists; there is only the perpetual present moment of existence that is susceptible to interpretation. However, the present moment (movement) is not divorced from the past but, rather, has evolved from it. Allan Bloom cites such evolutionary development in Descartes’ thought: “Descartes had a whole wonderful world of old beliefs, of prescientific experience and articulations of the order of things, beliefs firmly and evenly fanatically held, before he even began his systematic and radical doubt.”<sup>38</sup> As well, Bloom notes that Martin Heidegger turned to pre-Socratic thought forms in developing his ideas.

Heidegger was drawn instead to the pre-Socratic philosophers, from whom he hoped to discover another understanding of being to help him replace the exhausted

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<sup>37</sup> Searle, J. (1984:45) *Minds, Brains and Science* Penguin.

<sup>38</sup> Bloom, A. (1987:42) *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students* Simon & Schuster.

one inherited from Plato and Aristotle, which he and Nietzsche thought to be at the root of both Christianity and modern science.<sup>39</sup>

According to Ferguson, Stephen Hawking thinks similarly. Hawking “doesn’t hesitate to admit that an earlier conclusion was incorrect or incomplete. That’s the way his science—and perhaps all good science—advances, and one of the reasons why physics seems so full of paradoxes.”<sup>40</sup> Finally, Dewart notes a similar evolutionary development occurring in phenomenological thinking. He writes: “The phenomenological method ... is not the diametric opposite of the ontological; it is a more comprehensive one than the latter, whose merits it preserves and whose inadequacies it tries to remedy.”<sup>41</sup> Feuerbach’s philosophy is a phenomenological undertaking which returns to the individual’s experience for a re-interpretation in much the same manner as Heidegger returned to the pre-Socratic philosophers.

#### Phenomenological Thresholds in Feuerbach’s Philosophy.

Specifically, in his philosophy Feuerbach moved towards phenomenology in two important ways: first, in his philosophy, the idea of a fixed, objective interpretation of events moved to that of

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<sup>39</sup> Bloom, A. (1987:310) *The Closing of the American Mind*.

<sup>40</sup> Ferguson, K. (1992:122) *Stephen Hawking: Quest for a Theory of Everything* Bantam.

<sup>41</sup> Dewart, L. (1989:31) *Evolution and Consciousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature* University of Toronto Press.

continual interpretation of experience; second, a classical epistemology of knowing moved to a phenomenology of existential being, that is a being with feeling, not merely a sentient organism.

To engage in a phenomenological interpretation of existential being is a challenging task. Don Ihde offers advice that applies to Feuerbach's philosophy.

When one first learns a discipline, one must also learn a 'tribal language.' In philosophy, those who read Kant for the first time, or Leibnitz, or even Nietzsche, may find words being used in a different and often technical way. .... But if a discipline is to be mastered, the technical language simply must be learned. That is as true of sciences, logic, alternate styles of philosophy as it is of phenomenology. <sup>42</sup>

The present movement from fixed to continual interpretation within Western theological thinking arises partly from the attempts at reconciling contemporary interpretation with traditional understanding. Feuerbach's work is an example of this shift occurring in philosophy. Richard Tarnas referring to postmodern development, suggests that an additional evolutionary phase of philosophical understanding is "bringing a new form of civilization and a new world view with principles and ideals fundamentally different from those that have impelled the modern world through its dramatic trajectory" <sup>43</sup> The philosophy that supports Feuerbach's

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<sup>42</sup> Ihde, D. (1977:19) *Experimental Phenomenology: An Introduction* Putnam.

<sup>43</sup> Tarnas, R. (1991:410) *The Passion of the Western mind: Understanding Ideas that have Shaped our World View* Ballantine.

views is all about including them in this dramatic new trajectory. Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) creative thinking introduced a new philosophical understanding about intelligible categories. They exist but are not perceptible. This notion is reflected within Ludwig Feuerbach's (1804-1872) philosophy. A phenomenological threshold does disclose something new; it does not simply present variations of a previous interpretation. What is new in Feuerbach's thought is the methodology for the interpretation of previously conceived relationships. New methods of interpretation are conceived and new questions requiring further innovative resolutions arise in Feuerbach's philosophy. Religion is the context in which his new method appears.

Specific cultures provide a threshold for interpretation in which phenomenological understanding is continually constructed and reconstructed. History shows that those thresholds that die out have not exhausted their meaning. Rather, other thresholds, which are more suitably adapted to a specific cultural understanding, have become accepted, often leaving the old thresholds in place. Feuerbach's philosophy can be classed among the new culturally suitable thresholds.

As the scholastic thinker requires a secure grasp of idealistic thought and presumptions, so the phenomenological thinker requires a secure grasp of phenomenological understanding and presumptions. Two phenomenological philosophical presumptions contributing to this essay are that:

- *knowing* is actualized, that is, brought to such perfectibility, that one is able advantageously to realize, within existential consciousness, human moral possibilities. Knowing is not an act of an intellectual, or mental apprehension of independent theoretical structures.
- *unity* is actualized, that is, brought to such perfectibility, as being able to consciously establish dialectical relationships. Unity is not achieved through conforming to intellectual and ideal categories.

The critical and astute reader will recognize both presumptions relatively easily within Feuerbach's philosophy.

Classical knowledge is structured upon theoretical concepts which themselves are structured upon previous concepts<sup>44</sup> Classical knowledge consists of theoretical interpretations, which are theoretical interpretations of theoretical interpretations *ad infinitum*. Phenomenological knowledge differs from classical knowledge in that conscious (intended) understanding is constituted out of the present moment of being (existence). Noetic concepts are not revisions or refinements of ideal concepts, but are actualizations of the present moment of being. The old schema of theoretical knowledge is not perpetuated, nor preserved in a phenomenological epistemology. Given this line of thought, Karl Ludwig Von Bertalanffy's discussion on the philosophical re-orientation to

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Hodges, H. A. (1979) *God Beyond Knowledge* Macmillan, and Watts, F., & Williams, M. (1988) *The Psychology of Religious Knowing* Cambridge University Press.



“systems thought,” which is a movement from idealistic thinking to noetic thinking, continues Feuerbach’s understanding of philosophy. Von Bertalanffy writes:

Such a new ‘image of man,’ replacing the robot concept by that of system, emphasizing immanent activity instead of outer-directed activity ... should lead to a basic reevaluation of problems of education, training, psychotherapy, and human attitudes in general.<sup>45</sup>

Feuerbach’s philosophy, abstracted from religion, constructs (actualizes) noetic concepts, and reveals a phenomenological philosophy that structures new thresholds of interpretation. These new thresholds of interpretation are activities that assign values to existential being, that is, they are dynamic ontological acts. Frederick Streng notes that “the act of giving value is perceived as an ontological act because it determines the manner in which one recognizes and thereby ‘actualizes’ one’s existence.”<sup>46</sup> Actualizing one’s existence is clearly at the basis of Feuerbach’s philosophy.

The phenomenological view does not necessarily conform to any given system of knowledge. In a phenomenology of being, the boundaries of a relational state are not fixed, but are fluid. In a phenomenology of being one must think in terms of subjectivity and objectivity rather than in terms of subjectivism and objectivism.

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<sup>45</sup> Von Bertalanffy, K. L. (1968:194) *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications* Braziller.

<sup>46</sup> Streng, F. (1991:8) “Purposes and Investigative Principles in the Phenomenology of Religion: A Reconstruction” in the *Journal for the Study of Religion* 4: 3-17.

Subjectivism and objectivism denote a specific doctrine or system of knowledge, whereas subjectivity and objectivity are notions that connote a phenomenological and personal view of the life-world. To exclude subjective understanding and rely only on objective (ideal) understanding would be a phenomenological philosophical error. Because of this subjective approach, Darroch and Silvers suggest that an author's biography be incorporated into any interpretation of experience.<sup>47</sup> Feuerbach's life experience, articulated at the threshold of existentialism, provided the context out of which his philosophy has developed. In his Introductory Essay to the *Essence of Christianity*, Karl Barth noted that

Feuerbach works not only with human honesty and real seriousness; in contrast to specifically academic theology that begins with some sort of abstraction and moves and moves on to some sort of ideology, unrelated to the real life of men in their cities and villages, their little inns and factories, he works, as it were, with a Christian realism.<sup>48</sup>

I began this essay by abstracting Feuerbach's philosophical thinking in the context of German existentialism. To close, I quote the opening paragraph of *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* and invite the reader to ponder its content with respect to generating the the philosophical thought that came to support his theology. Schweitzer writes:

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<sup>47</sup> Darroch, V. & Silvers, R. (Eds, 1982) *Interpretive Human Studies: An Introduction to Phenomenological Research* University Press of America.

<sup>48</sup> *Essence of Christianity* (1957:xxiv) Harper (Torchbooks).

When, at some future day, our period of civilization shall lie, closed and completed, before the eyes of later generations, German theology will stand out as a great, a unique phenomenon in the mental and spiritual life of our time. For nowhere save in the German temperament can there be found in the same perfection the living complex of conditions and factors—of philosophic thought, critical acumen, historical insight, and religious feeling—without which no deep theology is possible.<sup>49</sup>

#### ADDITIONAL READING

Murray, Gilbert (1940) *Stoic, Christian and Humanist* C. A. Watts & Co.

Skolimowski, H. (1973) “The Twilight of Physical Descriptions and the Ascent of Normative Models” in E. Laszlo (Ed.) *The World System: Models, Norms, Applications* (99-118) Braziller.

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<sup>49</sup> Schweitzer, A. (1910:1) *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* Adam & Charles Black.

4. A MONOGRAPH ON *LAÏCITÉ*

A Phenomenological Perspective

ABSTRACT

My intention in this brief monograph is to stimulate a re-assessment of *laïcité* by philosophers and theologians, particularly within the Anglophone academic world. Often the term is understood by Anglophones not quite as accurately as its French advocates intend. The texts, as translated in this essay, are copied from the official French Government website, and used to support my philosophical perspective. In brief, I understand *laïcité* as a positive concept, that when properly understood, is not an adversary of religious belief. *Laïcité* is an evolving concept, not a static one, and it is philosophically contingent upon a societal consciousness of the place of religion in the world.

CONTENTS

<u><i>Laïcité</i></u> summarized briefly as understood in this monograph	93
<u><i>Laïcité</i></u> as particular republican value in contemporary France	99
<u><i>Laïcité</i></u> viewed from a phenomenological perspective as a cultural phenomenon	106
<u><i>Laïcité</i></u> an evolving political theology	111
<u><i>Laïcité</i></u> and the practical workings of its freedoms and prohibitions	117

§

**Laïcité**

Summarized briefly as understood in this monograph.

This monograph is a presentation of my understanding of the phenomenon of *laïcité* as it has evolved up to 2021 from a phenomenological perspective. Throughout this essay, I retain the French term because, to date, I have not found an English equivalent that adequately reflects the various and nuanced meanings of the French understanding of the meaning of the term. However, the English term *secularity*, understood as a positive concept, does come closest given my present perspective. To my way of thinking, Albert Keller gives a very satisfactory description upon which the phenomenological philosopher can contemplate. He suggests that *laïcité* (secularity) may be understood as the whole of human life ceasing “to be determined by religion. The result, secularity, then means independence and adulthood with regard to religion.”<sup>50</sup> *Laïcité*, as a philosophical phenomenon, cannot be adequately understood without knowing the history of its relationship to religion itself as a phenomenon of society.

Further, *laïcité*, as a contemporary political phenomenon, cannot be understood without a critical evaluation of the political evolution of the concept “Church and State” to that of “Religion and World,” as introduced by Vatican II.<sup>51</sup> (It is in a state of tension that this

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<sup>50</sup> s. v. ‘Secularization’ in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (ed. Karl Rahner) Burns and Oates (1975:1554).

<sup>51</sup> Vatican II expanded the Church’s political presence as a human value beyond the visible structures of the ecclesiastical corporation. Not the ancient, nor the

evolution occurs as evidenced in the French context.)<sup>52</sup> The former concept concerns the relative political autonomy of the State vis-à-vis the Church, whereas the latter concept concerns the contemporary moral authority of religion vis-à-vis the world. In the current era, the philosophical contemplation of many phenomenologists has shifted focus from politics to morality and ethics in which modern *laïcité* has its roots. *Laïcité*, as a moral or ethical phenomenon, cannot be examined to see what it is “in itself” without reference to the matrix of human life which constitutes its environment. Like all moral and ethical phenomena *laïcité* needs a concrete context to establish its reality. Just as the reality of justice can only be seen in the actions of a just person and the reality of truth only seen in the actions of a truthful person, etc., *laïcité*, like justice and truth, is thus relative to its context in phenomenological philosophy.

Within phenomenological philosophy, *laïcité* discloses a reconciliation between personal individual freedoms (which are subjective) with the collective values of a republic (which are objective). The need for such reconciliation was born within the politics and tensions of the 1789 French Revolution. And it is easy

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medieval, but the technically scientific world is to benefit from the Church’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. The astute phenomenological philosopher will, no doubt, contemplate the Constitution’s benefits for a postmodern and posthuman world.

<sup>52</sup> *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* “Religious Regulation in France” by Paul Christopher Manuel (Subject: Political Values, Beliefs, and Ideologies, World Politics) Online Publication Date: Feb 2019 DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.799.

to understand that *laïcité* could have arisen only within the polity of a Christian monarchy. The political rejection of the Western concept of the Divine Right of Kings is an historical confirmation of this simultaneously societal and religious doctrine. The Divine Right of Kings asserted that the monarch was subject to no earthly authority, but derived the right to rule directly from the will of God, and thus was not subject to the will of the people, the aristocracy, or any other estate in the realm, including the church. Interpreted strictly, the Divine Right of Kings implied that any attempt to depose the monarchy, or restrict its powers, was contrary to the will of God and could constitute treason. *Laïcité*, as currently understood, cannot be incorporated into the essence of a monarchical or hierarchical system of thought since it rejects the religious aspect and accepts the neutrality of the State. *Laïcité* is truly a republican concept that allows monarchy and religion only a celebratory status outside the apparatus of governance. This celebratory status originated with, and is tolerated by, the will of the people.

*Laïcité* is, at present, applicable only to public officials authoritatively representing the State (an objective notion) and who are in direct contact with the public. The nation (a subjective notion) is free to be religious, unless such “freedom” undermines cohesion and harmony within the State. Otherwise, *laïcité* does not apply to a nation’s non-administrative culture. Further, *laïcité* as it applies to public officials in the State and *laïcité* where it applies to national cultures may be distinguished as two different philosophical realities. *Laïcité* in the worlds of national cultures, usually where

Christianity dominates, means that philosophers may abandon the Hellenic idea of a religious universe such as Thales, a pre-Socratic philosopher (circa 585 B.C.) held, and conceive the world as a particular environment solely of human activity.<sup>53</sup> The abandonment of a religious universe, without its destruction, is held by many contemporary philosophers to be a positive decision born of the evolutionary development of human consciousness and existential philosophy. However, in the sense of rejecting or deleting from consciousness, or denying a religious universe and subsequently a religious State, *laïcité* is considered by many contemporary philosophers and politicians as a negative concept. I maintain that properly understood, *laïcité* is a positive notion appropriate to the evolutionary and intellectual maturing of humanity as a species. Concerning the Christian view of secularization, I follow Albert Keller's observation that "the true relationship between the Christian notion of God and a divinized world is precisely the opposite [of what is traditionally understood]: 'to Christianize the world means to secularize it.'" <sup>54</sup>

As I conceive it, *laïcité*, as a modern notion, is also a contemporary *political* theology historically arising out of a *pastoral* theology that came to formal religious consciousness, perhaps

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<sup>53</sup> Thales' idea that "all things are full of gods" ... meant that "the divinities are not actually found in peculiar or sacred places or times, as mythology. ... [Rather], the divinities lie immediately before us, in things themselves." Leslie Dewart (1969:54) *The Foundations of Belief* Herder and Herder.

<sup>54</sup> s. v. 'Secularization' in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (ed. Karl Rahner) Burns and Oates (1975:1559).



unwittingly so, in the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. As a political theology one might say that *laïcité* is the practical solution that modern Europe generated in order not to repeat the past and to escape contemporary civil wars over religion. Originating within Christianity the notion of *laïcité* is a peaceful measure to prevent national civil strife over differing religions. It is a theology that continues to evolve from the classical power of the *Sacerdotium* and *Imperium* to the modern unencumbered democratic powers (freedoms) of the Church vis-à-vis the State. As a Christian political theology *laïcité* is a doctrine concerning the independence and adulthood of the faithful in the presence of God. As a pastoral theology *laïcité* may be understood as an internal ecclesial stance influencing an authentic secularity and autonomy of the world, but not encouraging secularism, which is its false counterpart. Thus, *laïcité* as authentic secularity, exercises jurisdiction only over those who in civil governance authoritatively influence public policy, formally, informally, or casually. *Laïcité*, in this sense, is thus required of: 1) public officials, employees and volunteers who are in direct contact with the public, 2) professionals who intervene in the public space, 3) professionals who have a relationship of service to the population and elected officials. It makes no claim of jurisdiction over one's religious convictions or lack of religious convictions in the celebratory culture of nations, providing no harm is done to the State.

It may be recalled that *laïcité*, as a philosophical notion, originated as a negative concept. The negative aspect developed

within an earlier principle of the separation of Church and State in France that eventually evolved into their reciprocal independence which became enshrined in law on December 9, 1905. At that time, France, as a political entity, considered herself as an indivisible, secular, democratic and a social Republic (cf. article 1 of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic). Yet, as an ethnic identity, or nation, France also considered herself as a religious entity existing independently of the new Republic. That is, the Nation and the State are not phenomenologically co-terminus entities. Further, the philosophical question of *laïcité*, as an issue of religion *vs.* secularism, both within and without France has been studied regularly since the end of the 1980s. In French society, as within global society, each notion remains a controversial subject that is often mistakenly understood or misinterpreted. To my mind it would be of assistance to view the relationship between religion and secularity in a “both/and” perspective and not from an “either/or” perspective.

Thus, many questions arise concerning public officials in particular and citizens in general, on what is to allowed or not to be allowed, by the principle of fundamental freedoms in religion, in respect to the public order, and in the neutrality of the different societal contexts. With absolute respect for the individual freedom of conscience, *laïcité* is the guarantor of a French-style of society “living together,” a concept recognized by the European Court of Human Rights, which appears to be evolving towards a political and theological universality.

§

**Laïcité**

As a particular republican value in contemporary France.

In France, *laïcité* guarantees freedom of conscience. From this derives the freedom to practice one's beliefs or convictions respecting the lawful conditions of public order. *Laïcité* implies the neutrality of the State and recognizes the equality of all before the law without favouring, or supporting, any religion or belief system. *Laïcité* guarantees believers and non-believers the same right to freedom of expression of their beliefs or convictions. It ensures the right for an individual to be religious, to be an atheist (but not an anti-theist) or to be an agnostic, and to convert from one religion to another. It guarantees the free exercise of religious public worship. With respect to the freedom of religion *laïcité* means that no one can be forced by the State to embrace theological dogmas or religious doctrines. In other words, *laïcité* repudiates the Constantinian notion of the temporal political power intervening in religious affairs. *Laïcité* thus recognizes the political order as founded solely on the sovereignty of the people as the citizens of the State. The sovereignty of the citizens of the State legislates legal equality of all before the administration of the Public Service. That is to say that the equality of the people is not determined by divine right.

*Laïcité* is not merely one philosophical opinion among others, but rather, it is the freedom to have a philosophical opinion of one's own without religious interference. In law, then, it is not a philosophical conviction subject to cultural contingency, but an

objective principle, which permits all religious opinions that are not opposed to public harmony and order within the State. As a cultural phenomenon, *laïcité* is the glue of a united France, as advocated by the current Prime Minister, Mr. Jean Castex. But it is not a view shared by all the politicians in France. However, *laïcité* being a living principle, must adapt in order to retain all its original political significance. Recently, as part of the bill consolidating the principles of the Republic, which President Macron has called for, the parliamentarians, as representatives of the Nation, have had many debates on the changes to be made to the principle of *laïcité*. In 2021 the Government moved further to protect the balances enshrined in the French model of *laïcité* which is arguably unique in the world as it reconciles individual freedoms with the cohesion and unity of the Republic.

Currently, the government is up-dating and re-enacting the principles of *laïcité* inherited from the 1905 declaration by adapting them to the challenges of France's contemporary society. Upon completion the new declaration will ensure that the principle of *laïcité* is respected and promoted regularly by all those who are its officers. That is to say by all administrations, public services and organizations that are responsible to the government. No spirit contrary to the Republic is to be tolerated in the re-enactment of the principle of *laïcité*. In the re-enactment, freedom of worship will be properly re-affirmed with the intent of achieving harmony and cohesiveness in the public order of the Republic. That means that

religions will be able to manage their legal and financial responsibilities in the best interest of the community.

The re-enactment suggests to me that a shift in the overall philosophical/political understanding of the 1905 notion of *laïcité* is taking place. The French government's re-enactment will focus on several points of investigation to be overseen by the general secretariat of the Interministerial Committee, newly created within the Ministry of the Interior. It will also provide up-dated support systems to all those, administrators, and public officials, required to implement these measures. Clearly, then, in the mind of the current French government *laïcité* is not a fixed ideological concept immune to evolutionary forces. Rather, French *laïcité* constitutes a dynamic and fluid approach to the phenomenon of religion in the modern Republic. It is highly likely that political administrations, outside France, which embrace phenomenological philosophical policies rather than classical ones will follow suit.

With Anglophone philosophers in mind and for the sake of precision of thought, the following French text is a summary of the points covered throughout this monograph which may not be as precise as the French text.

## §

La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale. Elle assure l'égalité devant la loi de tous les citoyens sans distinction d'origine, de race ou de religion. Elle garantit des droits égaux aux hommes et aux femmes et respecte toutes les croyances. Nul ne doit

être inquiété pour ses opinions, même religieuses, pourvu que leur manifestation ne trouble pas l'ordre public établi par la loi. La liberté de religion ou de conviction ne rencontre que des limites nécessaires au respect du pluralisme religieux, à la protection des droits et libertés d'autrui, aux impératifs de l'ordre public et au maintien de la paix civile. La République assure la liberté de conscience et garantit le libre exercice des cultes dans les conditions fixées par la loi du 9 décembre 1905. Au titre de la laïcité, la République ne reconnaît, ne salarie ni ne subventionne aucun culte, ce qui implique qu'aucune religion ou conviction puisse être, ni privilégiée ni discriminée. La laïcité repose sur la séparation des Églises et de l'État, ce qui implique que les religions ne s'immiscent pas dans le fonctionnement des pouvoirs publics et que les pouvoirs publics ne s'ingèrent pas dans le fonctionnement des institutions religieuses. Les élus de la République ont la charge de faire respecter la laïcité. Elle suppose un engagement fort et constant de la puissance publique pour assurer sa pédagogie et sa promotion. La laïcité, parce qu'elle est une des conditions fondamentales du vivre ensemble, requiert une lutte constante contre toutes les discriminations. La puissance publique doit garantir à tous et sur l'ensemble du territoire la possibilité d'accéder à des services publics, où s'impose le respect du principe de neutralité, à côté d'autres services d'intérêt général. Tout agent d'une administration publique, ou du gestionnaire d'un service public a un devoir de stricte neutralité. Il se doit d'adopter un comportement impartial vis à vis des usagers du service public et de ses collègues de travail. Les manquements à ces règles doivent être relevés et peuvent faire l'objet de sanctions. La République laïque garantit l'exercice de tous les droits civils quelles que soient les convictions ou les croyances de chacun. Aucune religion ne peut imposer

ses prescriptions à la République. Aucun principe religieux ne peut conduire à ne pas respecter la loi.

## §

The following translation of the Declaration for *Laïcité* (Paris, September 22, 2016) is provided by the *Observatoire de la laïcité*.

### DECLARATION FOR *LAÏCITÉ*\*

\*“*Laïcité*” is usually translated by “secularism,” in view, however, of its particular status in France, as a cardinal principle enshrined in the Constitution, guaranteeing the same rights and duties to believers and non-believers alike, *Laïcité* will be retained throughout this Declaration.

*Laïcité* is our common good. It must be promoted and defended. It must unite us, not divide us. In the present times, when there is much questioning and also a tendency to be over-zealous, it is the responsibility of the *Observatoire de la laïcité* to recall what is meant by *Laïcité*, as defined in the Constitution of the Republic and organised by the law of December 9, 1905.

*Laïcité* is first the freedom of conscience, the freedom to believe or not to believe. The freedom to believe implies the freedom to practice a religion, in private or in public, as long as the manifestation of the practice does not disturb the peace.

In the public interest, there are limits set to the freedom to manifest one’s convictions. To start with, it is forbidden for public servants, and all those who have public service duties, to display their own religious faith: public service must be neutral, so that users are treated equally, regardless of their convictions. In 2004, in order to protect schoolchildren against any form of pressure, the ostensible manifestation of a religion through

insignia or dress was banned in all state-run primary and secondary schools. In 2010, for public security reasons, concealing one's face in public was prohibited (burka, niqab, hoods, helmets, etc.)

It is possible to impose limits, but freedom must remain the basic principle. General prohibition of any outward religious sign in public or in private collective areas would not strengthen *Laïcité*, but would denature it, by turning a freedom into a prohibition.

### *LAÏCITÉ* GUARANTEES RESPECT FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY

*Laïcité*, which implies the separation between the Churches and the State, guarantees equality among all citizens, regardless of their philosophical or religious convictions. Atheists, agnostics, believers of all creeds enjoy the same rights. The law cannot distinguish among citizens according to their convictions. No religious obligation can be imposed by law. Religions cannot intervene in the affairs of State, and the State must respect the independence of religions.

Stigmatising a religion, imposing restrictions on the religious practices of one particular religion, would be an attack on the Republican principle of Equality, and would be discriminatory.

### *LAÏCITÉ* CONTRIBUTES TO THE REPUBLICAN IDEAL OF FRATERNITY

As the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen proclaims, "*Men are born and remain free and equal in rights.*" And yet they are not all alike. They are free to express their own particular convictions and what they adhere to.



Adhering to the values of the Republic helps to bring citizens together and to accept their differences. *Laïcité* federates and reinforces the unity of the nation. It guards against all that divides or separates. It is a factor of national union and concord, and thereby contributes to the Republican ideal of Fraternity.

*Laïcité* must be defended against all those who fight it or deny it. Those who do not respect its rules must be sanctioned. But a *Laïcité* based on exclusion and prohibition would weaken itself by denying its founding principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

After centuries of religious conflict, *Laïcité*, born of the 1789 Declaration of the rights of man and the citizen, of the legislation secularising education at the end of the 19th century and the law of December 9, 1905, has enabled France today to strike a balance that is a precious asset. We must neither allow it to be brought into question, nor succumb to excessive zeal, even if the difficulties encountered in applying it in a new social and international context call for greater vigilance.

§

**Laïcité**

Viewed from a phenomenological perspective as a cultural  
phenomenon.

Inspiration for this section came from “The Phenomenology of White Identity” by Linda Martín Alcoff in *Race as Phenomena: Between Phenomenology and Philosophy of Race* (ed. Emily S. Lee) Rowman & Littlefield (2019:175-188). My philosophical conclusion is that contemporary *laïcité* is an evolutionary phenomenon appearing uniquely in those European cultures claiming a secular identity.

What does it mean to assign oneself a secular identity to describe a way of being in the world as an attitude or disposition in lieu of a religious life? Secular identity, from a phenomenological perspective, refers less to a set of empirical facts about a person and more concerning the observable aspects of personal subjectivity, that is, individual behaviour. The phenomenological concept of secular identity acts as a positive and cohesive choice in determining individual and group societal values in the world. The notion of secular identity, then, can help to balance the essentialist and determinist conceptions of society often linked to, and dominated by, the historical influence of religion. Secular identity, arising from an individual's orientation towards the world, is contingent, variable, and dynamic and its realization evolves by disclosing the hidden and subtle motives for the choice of a religious life, or the choice not to be religious. As Auguste Comte has observed:

The further we proceed in our review of the social operation of the theological spirit, the more we shall perceive how great is the mistake of supposing that religious belief is the

only basis of human association, to the exclusion of all other orders of common conceptions.<sup>55</sup>

To assign oneself a secular identity is to accept human responsibility in evaluating experiences that may seem to be highly individual or, transcendental and universal. Phenomenologists understand human experience as inescapable in the world. But there are many personal worlds, not merely one, which overlap disclosing complex interrelationships. One thing that is clear is that secular identity is an historically acquired identity, not an innate one. From an anthropological perspective humanity is not naturally irreligious, but naturally religious with each nation believing its gods as superior to others. The notion of assigning oneself a secular identity emerged out of the historical strife over religious experiences and the state-enforced political advantages in favour of a particular religion over other religions. In this sense, secular identity evolved as a result of a particular Western historical experience and its efforts at power politics.

The lived experience of secular identity by a significant portion of Western society has produced some large-scale societal changes, as well as introducing some particular State legislative policies. Numerous scholars, particularly sociologists, social psychologists, political scientists, economists, and historians, have spent much time studying secular identity within Western culture. And, as a result, to assign oneself a secular identity has become a desirable

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. *The Theories of Society: Foundations of Modern Sociological Theory* (Vol. 1) Eds., T. Parsons, E. Shils, K. Naegle, J. Pitts (1961:650) Free Press of Glencoe.

goal for many individuals as an option in life. Secular identity remains an important constituent of many State societal patterns. Beyond secular identity as a constituent of the social environment, there is the distinct first-person human consciousness, or the personal experience of secularity. Among the various personal secular experiences, philosophers discern similarities. In distinguishing these similarities, the work of social psychologists has been most important in revealing significant patterns of secular identity in the perceptual, judgmental, and affective responses to experience of the individual. Secular identity can also disclose not only how we live in our world but how we participate in fashioning our world as agents. Whether liberal or conservative, urban, or rural, poor, or middle class, secular identity may discredit (incorrectly) certain options in living life, i.e., living life religiously.

Today's secular identity discloses new practices and takes new forms, and cannot maintain the anti-religious stance of former times. Secular identity, just as all identity formulations, is multidimensional and dynamic and in constant process of reproduction, regeneration, and transformation to more updated forms. Upon philosophical reflection, the assignment of a secular identity need not be the necessary result of a process of deliberation over religion. The retention of a religious identity, or its cultural equivalent, may be the result. In the temporal order of priorities, the acquisition, or acceptance of a religious identity, must logically precede the assignment of a secular identity. The process is that of an atheist who needs the presence of a god, or gods, in which not to

believe. Further, the assignment of a secular identity is not an arbitrary act on the part of the individual, but is existentially and thoroughly thought out. Nor is it, in any sense, a belief system, but secular identity expresses an overall orientation or attitude to the world that organizes and unifies the individual's experience in the world. A phenomenological recognition of secular identity requires knowledge of the variety of optional personal and societal values available to human beings. In actuality, the assignment of a secular identity always involves the individual's past experiences, or memories that are retained, and how this affects the individual's orientation in the present world and attitude towards a future world. In that light secular identity has no independent ontological status. Secular identity does not denote that which is outside of culture, but precisely that which is within culture that has been rejected. Rejection notwithstanding, however, secular identity is a positive human value when understood in terms of a contemporary *laïcité*. Secular identity simply illustrates an option of human behaviour vis-à-vis religious experience, often taken for granted without critique or questioning.

Although an exceptional occurrence, the self-assignment of a secular identity by an individual is indicative of the uniquely human and rational ability to define existential cultural values. The self-assignment of a secular identity is a distinctly human function that makes the individual free to re-invent itself without any religious historical encumbrance. In contemporary *laïcité* the State ensures the ability of individuals to acquire a secular identity, without an

interfering religion, through political and economic opportunities available in their particular cultural context.

The possibility of republican democracy and national cohesiveness being characteristic of the assignment of a secular identity is the result of the particular context of European history. Some philosophers, particularly of the Anglophone tradition, doubt that *laïcité* will ever succeed as a significant political and cultural phenomenon. However, the secular State never set itself the purpose of creating a nation that could unite and stabilize social groups with diverse cultural experiences and histories. The agenda of the State, particularly evident in France, is harmony and cohesion within governance of the Nation composed of these groups while allowing the assignment of a secular identity by its citizens. Within the French understanding of governance, when there is no longer the possibility of a secular identity, alongside a religious one, there will no longer be a republican democracy that has something unique to offer the world. Rather, Christendom will have been restored in some fashion and the world will be once more in an imbalance due to religious strife.

§

**Laïcité**

As an evolving political theology.

From a phenomenological perspective, *laïcité* may be consciously envisioned as an evolving *Political Theology*. What, then I ask, is antecedent to contemporary *laïcité* in the French political experience? The 1905 French law separating the Church and the State is over a hundred years old. The dynamic principle of *laïcité* it defined, despite the term not being mentioned in the text, is unique in the world and is an integral part of France's contemporary political apparatus. This principle is, however, protected neither by the fact that it is legal nor by its relatively old age. Indeed, it is controversial both 1) at the national level, where it is subject to contradictory debates, and 2) at the international level, where France is often accused of having an intolerant and discriminatory system of the separation of Church and State.

*Laïcité* is the product of the long evolution of the relationship between the Church and the State. As Rome's authority was universal in Western Europe, to all intents and purposes, up to the Reformation, France particularized its authority as it broke away from the Papacy with the rise of the Capetian monarchy. From the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Philip IV of France opposed the Pope's interference in the kingdom's affairs. He inaugurated a policy of autonomy, which somewhat reduced the ecclesiastical establishment in political affairs and posited that, in its order, the civil jurisdiction did not recognize any superior jurisdiction.

The Gallican movement reached its peak under Louis XIV with the Declaration of the Clergy of France of 1682. This movement favoured the independence of the king in the temporal order and supported the superiority of an ecumenical council over the Pope. Affirming implicitly that the Church's influence was limited to spiritual representation outside of temporal realities, the Declaration enshrined in national patrimony the idea that political power precedes religious authority. The Enlightenment, as a French movement, took advantage of this principle during the Revolution and promoted its acceptance within the French Republic. Today, the Republic must continue work towards liberating religious organizations from State regulation, including Protestantism, Judaism, and Islam and strive for the autonomous freedom of belief in the public forum.<sup>56</sup> Ministers of religious affairs who have public authority and support, must remain under government control, to

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<sup>56</sup> As a phenomenological philosopher, it does not seem to me that the preservation of religion in the public form must be confined to republican values. I suggest *Laïcité* has its royal counterpart. Ian Bradley notes that when he was Prince of Wales, King Charles III expressed "his own novel interpretation of the monarch's traditional role as Defender of the Faith: 'I personally would rather see it as Defender of Faith, not the Faith, because it (Defender of the Faith) means just one particular interpretation of the Faith, which I think is sometimes something that causes a deal of a problem. It has done for hundreds of years. People have fought each other to the death over these things, which seems to me a peculiar waste of people's energy, when we're all actually aiming for the same ultimate goal, I think. So I would much rather it was seen as defending faith itself which is so often under threat in our day where, you know, the whole concept of faith itself or anything beyond this existence, beyond life itself is considered almost old-fashion and irrelevant.'" *God Save the Queen: The Spiritual Dimension of the Monarchy* (2002:169) Darton, Longman & Todd.



which they are obliged to swear their loyalty. Ministers of autonomous religious bodies are not subject to this particular civic rule.

Avoidance of both interference and discrimination by either authority in the other's jurisdiction was the guiding principle of the 1905 law. Article 2 of that law dictated negatively that "the Republic neither recognizes nor employs nor subsidizes cults", and positively guaranteed the freedom of particular religious organizations, as long as they did not violate the public order. The State abolished the earlier public and particular rights granted to institutions or religious congregations, and confined their status to personal and private freedoms. However, the notion of personal and private freedoms did not mean, and did not intend, that there be no relationship to the public sphere of life in the Nation. The State only intended to recognize individuals as free citizens, irrespective of their background, whether it be religious or ethnic. In short, the State applied a phenomenological *epochē* or "bracketing out" of certain human characteristics, in this case, religion, in defining its notion of citizenship. However, despite the fact that the State desired politically to neutralize religious differences within its borders (in order to prevent divisive factions) it did not seek to neutralize community within the public sphere of the life of the Nation. Yet, the 1905 law was not devoid of its weaknesses. The State acted, inspired by an optimistic ideology, according to which its future depended on the emancipation of religion from the State. But to the contrary, this early *laïcité* where religion had no influence of the

citizenry, had the effect of provoking the loss of a cohesive cultural identity in France. Further, the two World Wars, each in its own way, disrupted the political apparatus of France. Thus, the Fifth Republic opted, once more, for a “healing” policy during the years from 1945 to 1975.<sup>57</sup>

The conception of *laïcité* as a shared and accepted *modus vivendi* was destabilized twice in France from the 1980s onwards: first by the diversification of faith caused by migration to France, and secondly by the “return of God” movement in politics, which was spreading globally. This unsettled the French Republican elites as nothing had done before. For them, rethinking religion while at the same time retaining its founding principles, became a matter of urgency. Confronted with the rise of extremisms, in particular radical Islam, and with increasing communitarian political claims, the government of the Republic acted sternly. Religious symbols at schools were restricted in 2004, and concealing one’s face in public spaces was forbidden in 2010, and, as one thing led to the other, Nativity scenes were proscribed in town halls in 2016.

The Republic and the Church are still part of the national identity of France. But neither are not exempt from criticisms of their

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<sup>57</sup> J. Middleton Murry, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century literary critic, suggested that a problem for modern philosophers was the understanding of the new Western world that followed the Great War of 1914-1918. However, optimistically, he noted that “it is really not a new world, but the old one clearly seen for the first time. But it is a new world for them in which the lines of cleavage were entirely different from what they had seemed to be; a world which seemed cold and alien and hostile, yet afterwards appeared to have at least the attraction that discoveries might be made in it and new lessons learned.” *The Evolution of an Intellectual* (1927:171) Jonathan Cape Publisher.

respective positions. In France, the political milieu, and the media coverage between supporters of a strict version of *laïcité*, such as is evident in pre-Vatican II theology, and supporters of an open version of *laïcité*, such as is evident in Vatican II theology, are a sign of the times. It is reasonable to expect that there is a similar experience on a global scale given the signs of the times. Since quarrels over *laïcité* go beyond the country's borders, France is regularly accused of initiating and exporting religious intolerance by many in the international community. From my perspective, it is becoming evident on a global scale that political debate has disclosed two differing interpretations which illustrate the deep cultural differences between a strict *laïcité* (characteristic of the French interpretation of *laïcité*) and an open *laïcité* (characteristic of Anglo-Saxon interpretation).

Thus, contemporary *laïcité*, in its strict or open form, is not readily, nor easily, understood outside of France. Often neglected in the secularist debate is the theological antecedent to secular politics. Having transcended French politics, contemporary *laïcité* may also be understood (dare I say misunderstood) as a global societal phenomenon opposing any religion as being a necessary quality or specification of human existence. *Laïcité* is subject to misunderstanding in its role of re-positioning any form of religion. The truth is that the function of *laïcité* is tantamount to generating a mature political consciousness concerning religious belief. As I philosophically envision it, a mature political consciousness is a necessary step in understanding the process of human evolution.

Given the shift in Vatican II theology from “Church and State” to “Church and World,” as Karl Rahner has acknowledged, a re-fashioning of Christian belief appears to be necessary in the minds of many of the faithful and religious devotees.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, such a change is taking place and is profoundly altering the philosophical understanding of the unity of humanity. Reason alone is no longer sufficient to define human specificity. On one hand, as a contemporary societal phenomenon, *laïcité* challenges the political reasons for recognizing any religion. On the other hand, as a philosophical (theological) phenomenon, *laïcité* challenges the classical principle of reason as defining humanity, and favours historical development as influenced by human evolution as defining humanity. The globalization of Western culture and philosophy, has influenced non-Western cultures to favour modern democratic and individual rights (and freedoms) over traditional monarchical and aristocratic rights (and freedoms). Thus, *laïcité*, exercised on a globalized scale of political/theological theory and praxis, is able to guarantee both freedom and equality with respect to religions and the world.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. ‘Church and World’ in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (ed. Karl Rahner) Burns & Oates, 1975.

<sup>59</sup> In this section I have relied heavily on the article, “*Laïcité*: Why French Secularism is So Hard to Grasp,” by Institut Montaigne (Articles, 11 December, 2017) a non-profit, independent organization based in Paris, France. The author, Dr. Anastasia Colosimo is a professor of political theology at Sciences Po, Paris. Both organizations are accessible via the Internet.

§

**Laïcité**

And the practical workings of its freedoms and prohibitions.

FREEDOMS AND PROHIBITIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF  
“*LAÏCITÉ*”

(CONSTITUTIONAL SECULARISM)

[English translation of this section provided by *Observatoire de la Laïcité*]

The last decades have seen the emergence, in a fragile social context, of new phenomena, such as the rise in communitarian demands and the misuse of secularism for the purpose of stigmatisation; the *Observatoire de la Laïcité* has therefore decided to issue a succinct, precise reminder of what *Laïcité* means in terms of freedoms and prohibitions.

1. PROHIBITIONS AND LIMITS TO INDIVIDUAL  
FREEDOMS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF “*LAÏCITÉ*”

The principle of secularism means that the State and religious organisations are separate. There is therefore no state-run public worship. The State neither recognises, nor subsidises, nor salaries any form of worship. Exceptions and adjustments to the ban on funding are defined in the legislation and case-law; they concern in particular chaplaincies, which are paid for by the State.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> In accordance with Article 2, paragraph 2 of the law of December 9, 1905.

No religion can impose its prescriptions on the Republic. No religious principle can be invoked for disobeying the law.

## PROHIBITIONS AND LIMITS IN SPECIFIC AREAS

In the administration, public services, and firms and associations with a public service mission, employees and agents are not allowed to manifest their religious, political or philosophical beliefs by signs, clothes or proselytism. Agents and employees represent in fact the nation as a whole, and must therefore adopt a neutral and impartial attitude, both towards the public and towards those they work with. Infringements are recorded, and can be sanctioned.

In private enterprises with no public service activity, manifestations of religious beliefs may be restricted or prohibited by the company's regulations, if this is justified by the nature of the work and on condition that the limitation is proportionate to the desired objective.<sup>61</sup>

In the public area, in the sense of a common space (public streets and areas open to the public or used for public services), the Law of October 11, 2010 prohibits concealing one's face. The law is not based on the *laïcité* principle, but on public security considerations and the minimum demands of life in society.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Article L 1121-1 of the Code du travail; Article L 1321-2-1 of the Code du travail; Directive 78/2000 CE of the Conseil d'État, November 27, 2000.

<sup>62</sup> Decision of the Conseil constitutionnel, n° 2010-613 DC, October 7, 2010.

## PROHIBITIONS AND LIMITS IN PUBLIC SERVICES

Under the law of December 9, 1905, patients can practice their faith in public health institutions as long as they do not impede the functioning of the department, and subject to the requirements of public order, security, health and hygiene. The freedom to choose one's doctor does not apply in emergency situations (a doctor cannot be challenged by a patient). Nor can freedom of choice run counter to the doctors' duty roster or the organisation of medical consultations required for ensuring the continuity of public service. In the case of a patient's refusal to accept treatment (a blood transfusion, for instance), while the patient's consent remains the basic principle, entailing therefore his or her right of refusal, the courts accept that for performing an act essential for survival doctors may disregard the rule.<sup>63</sup>

For mass catering in public institutions, the responsible authority, necessarily neutral, must not take into account religious prescriptions concerning food, (halal or casher [kosher]), but can offer a choice of menus, with or without meat, for instance. However, in certain closed public institutions (for example prisons, boarding establishments or hospitals) or in the army, in application of Article 2, paragraph 2 of the Law of December 9, 1905,<sup>64</sup> the supervisory authority must take into account the fact that certain

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<sup>63</sup> Conseil d'État, October 26, 2001. Senanayaké

<sup>64</sup> Expenditures incurred by chaplaincies for ensuring that religions can be freely practiced in institutions such as primary and secondary schools, hospices, mental homes and prisons, may however be included in the corresponding budgets.

persons may not have the opportunity to practice their faith elsewhere. In such cases, the *laïcité* principle requires that steps be taken to enable such persons to comply with the food prescriptions of their religion, as long as they do not disturb the functioning of the public service and do not constitute a form of pressure on the members of the group who do not wish to follow suit.<sup>65</sup>

In public sector primary and secondary schools it is forbidden for pupils to manifest ostensibly their religious affiliation by signs or clothes.<sup>66</sup> In such places, and at an age when the foundations of knowledge are acquired and critical faculties developed, the aim is to protect children from pressures aimed at making them wear such a sign, and to prevent conflicts between those wearing the sign and those who do not.

In public sector higher education establishments, although all faculty members enjoy freedom of expression, all staff members charged with a mission, including individual contractors, whether or not they are in contact with students, are subject to the rules applicable to all officials and public servants and to private sector employees providing a public service. However, such obligations, including that of neutrality, cannot be imposed on outside speakers invited to give a one-off lecture in a public sector establishment. Furthermore, teachers cannot refuse to give a class on the grounds, for instance, that one or several students are wearing religious signs.

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<sup>65</sup> Conseil d'État, February 10, 2016, n°385929, M.B.

<sup>66</sup> Law of March 15, 2004, regulating the application of the *laïcité* principle to the wearing of signs or clothes manifesting a religious affiliation in public sector primary and secondary schools.



## SPECIFIC BEHAVIOURS AND PROSELYTISM IN VARIOUS AREAS

Specific behaviours can arise, such as refusing to shake the hand of a person of the opposite sex, to be with such a person in certain collective areas, to work with such a person or to be examined medically by such a person. While there is no rule imposing a given form of politeness, as practices vary according to country, age and social status, forms of behaviour contrary to the equality between women and men and to human dignity are unacceptable, and can be considered to be discriminatory.

In public service areas (sports facilities, public swimming pools, etc.), requests for single-sex schedules can be refused, not on the basis of the *laïcité* principle, but on the grounds of gender equality and non-discrimination.<sup>67</sup>

Religious proselytism, consisting in attempting to convince someone to join a religion other than simply by clothes or religious signs,<sup>68</sup> is forbidden in public services in the name of neutrality.

The same holds true in private firms when, through the means employed or the message conveyed, they disturb the peace or the normal functioning of the enterprise. The same applies when communitarian pressure forces individuals to engage in religious

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<sup>67</sup> However, Article 225-3 of the Code penal lists several exceptions, justified by “the protection of victims of sexual violence; considerations related to respect for privacy and decency, and the promotion of gender equality or the interests of men and women; and the freedom of association and the organisation of sporting activities”.

<sup>68</sup> Conseil d’État, November 27, 1996; n° 170207, 170208.

practices, or practices presented as such, which they had not personally expressed the desire to abide by.

## 2. FREEDOMS AND RIGHTS GUARANTEED BY *LAÏCITÉ*

*Laïcité* guarantees freedom of conscience for everyone; this includes the freedom to believe or not to believe, to practice a religion, to be atheist, agnostic or to be an adept of humanist philosophies, to change religion or to cease to have any religion. A distinction must be drawn, however, between the freedom to believe and the freedom to express one's beliefs. There can be no restriction to the freedom of belief. The freedom of thought from which derives the freedom of conscience includes the freedom to criticise any idea, opinion or belief, subject only to the legal limits of the freedom of expression. The freedom to express one's religious convictions, however, can be limited for the sake of public order, under conditions defined by the law (see the first part of this note). Freedom must however always be the rule, and the limitations the exception, in view of the constitutional principles enshrined in our Republic and France's international commitments, with which such legal restrictions must be compatible.

*Laïcité* guarantees the neutrality of the State, local authorities and public services, thereby ensuring their impartiality towards all citizens, regardless of their beliefs and convictions.

The Republic neither recognises, nor salaries nor subsidises any form of worship. No religion or conviction can be either privileged

or discriminated against. *Laïcité* is based on the separation between the Churches and the State, which means that the Churches cannot intervene in the functioning of the public authorities and that the public authorities do not manage the functioning of religious institutions.

*Laïcité* is an emancipating factor in two ways. On the one hand, the State is emancipated from any form of religious control. *Laïcité* in France is based on the same principle as democracy: in neither case is the legitimacy of political authority founded on a supernatural basis, but on the sole sovereignty of the people of citizens. And secondly, *laïcité* emancipates religions from any form of State control. It guarantees believers and non-believers and agnostics the same rights, in particular the same right to the freedom to express their convictions.

*Laïcité* guarantees freedom of religion, but also freedom vis-à-vis religions: no one can be forced to respect religious dogma or prescriptions.

With *laïcité*, the Republic guarantees the exercise of all civil rights, regardless of individual persuasions or beliefs.

5. CONTEMPORARY ECCLESIOLOGY and the  
PRINCIPLE of *LAÏCITÉ* <sup>69</sup>

Philosophical Consciousness with an Eye to Posthumanity. <sup>70</sup>

INTRODUCTION

The *via negativa*, dehellenization and *laïcité* are all positive philosophical concepts consciously constructed by humans, but expressed negatively. They disclose a conscious aspect of religion, which has evolved within traditional Western philosophy.

However, this philosophical essay deals with one particular aspect of *laïcité* abstracted from the notion of secularization current among Western Anglophone philosophers. This particular aspect of the principle of *laïcité* consists in a new interpretation that, in fact,

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<sup>69</sup> Some Catholic readers may be familiar with Giuseppe Alberigo's understanding of the term as outlined in "Facteurs de laïcité au Concile Vatican II" in *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, tome 74, fas. 2, 2000, in which he writes in a footnote: "*Ce mot est utilisé dans le sens du processus de 'décléricalisation' à l'intérieur de l'Église et non pas pour indiquer une orientation pour l'autonomie de l'État vis-à-vis de l'Église.*" My approach is the opposite. I understand the term to indicate the autonomy of both the Church and State from each other as organizations in their respective realms of jurisdiction.

<sup>70</sup> I say "posthumanity," not "post-classical," because while at first blush it may appear that Western philosophy has advanced beyond the classical age of philosophy, the high degree of technological intervention (unavailable in the classical age) indicates, not only an advancement, but an alteration in the human being's status within creation. Yet, many philosophers maintain that a classical understanding of human nature is sufficient in the modern world. But this may not remain the case. That is to say, "when computer science is combined with quantum physics and nanotechnology, the result may soon be a combination of a human being and machine" (Hellsten, Sirkku 2012:5 "The Meaning of Life" during a Transition from Modernity to Transhumanism and Posthumanity *Journal of Anthropology*)

<https://www.hindawi.com/journals/janthro/2012/210684/>. [accessed 21 Sept. 2022]

amounts to a conscious shift for the future philosophical systems of the ecclesial and secular political orders. Western posthuman philosophical interpretation, as it appears on the conscious horizon of humanity, will not be undertaken from the same philosophical perspective as it was in the Medieval period, since European science has given rise to a techno-digital civilization. What makes this drive to techno-digital civilization so significant is that many philosophers still unrealistically believe that they are working to liberate humanity from the earlier fetters imposed by the natural order and the classical theological traditions. In George Grant's words:

Man has at last come of age in the evolutionary process, has taken his fate into his own hands and is freeing himself for happiness against the old necessities of hunger and disease and overwork, and the consequent oppressions and repressions. The conditions of nature — that “otherness” — which so long enslaved us, when they appeared as a series of unknown forces, are now at last beginning to be understood in their workings so that they can serve our freedom.<sup>71</sup>

All aspects of contemporary life are affected by this new technological paradigm which continues to raise new philosophical questions, to which the answers cannot always be anticipated in advance. The modern philosophical human context is fundamentally existential, and humans are “here” in a new intellectual “land,” that is in fact a *terra incognita* from the perspective of philosophical

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<sup>71</sup> Grant, George (1969:28) *Technology and Empire* Anansi.

interpretation. With respect to religion in general and the Christian religion in particular, and in light of posthuman techno-digital advancement, many philosophers are uncertain as to their understanding and conventional acceptance of God and religious faith within the political order given the inherited relationship between Church and State.

In light of the posthuman perspective, the central philosophical question about God is not, “does God exist?” (the humanist philosophical question) but, rather “what place in posthuman conscious reflection do God and religion occupy, if any?” (The significance of this question for the principle of *laïcité* should become apparent as this inquiry proceeds.) Alternatively expressed, the posthuman question may be stated: has Christian revelation, as expressed in past terms, been decisively received once and for all, and accepted as adequate for future understanding? To answer this question the posthuman philosopher and theologian need to review the influence of “classical” humanism in the Church from a critical historical perspective to understand how humanity has arrived where it is today. It must be borne in mind that the various movements in religious and secular history, though related, cannot be synchronized but have developed along their particular timelines.

Given the many facts that I could have selected in speculating about posthumanity, I consider the understanding of the evolution of human consciousness to be key in revealing the notion of

posthuman theism, giving rise to a new concept of humanity.<sup>72</sup> In the evolution of posthumanity in human experience there arises the necessity of a revised philosophical understanding of the human being, as both effecting and being affected by the intervention of technology and scientific progress. The increase in the intervention of technology and science in human affairs invites philosophers and theologians to reconsider the ecclesiology of the Church in relation to the State, which also is at the threshold of posthumanity. This reconsideration has begun in the documents of Vatican II, particularly *Gaudium et Spes*, I contend.

## PART I

### The Pastoral Ecclesiology of *Gaudium et Spes* and Other Council Documents.<sup>73</sup>

To my mind, the phenomenological philosophical perspective evident in *Gaudium et Spes*, although not readily apparent to all, provides an opportunity to explore the notions of effectivity and affectivity in the actions of the person. Thus, I explore this pastoral constitution from the perspective of literary criticism without specific reference to the orthodoxy of catechetical or theological principles. A task of modern philosophers has been to distinguish

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<sup>72</sup> For the interested reader Leslie Dewart's *Evolution and Consciousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature* (University of Toronto Press 1989) is a good introductory text to this question.

<sup>73</sup> All quotes from *Gaudium et Spes*, *Ad Gentes Divinitus* and *Dignitatis Humanae* are taken from Flannery, Austin (1996) *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents* Costello Publishing (N.Y.) and Dominican Publications (Ireland).

clearly between the disciplines of philosophy and theology. This task of distinguishing the two will likely continue to evolve within the posthuman understanding of intellectual activity. Thus, I seek out evidence of this in *Gaudium et Spes* (the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), and in *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity) and *Dignitatis Humanae* (the Declaration on Religious Liberty).

The Council addresses the modern “world as the theatre of human history, bearing the marks of its travail, triumphs and failures” which include many philosophical perspectives concerning the meaning of the individual in society.<sup>74</sup> Given its contemporary philosophical structure and intellectual goals, the church “is not motivated by earthly ambition but is interested in one thing only — to carry on the work of Christ ....”<sup>75</sup> Therefore, as I see it, the church poses no direct threat to the correct understanding of the principle of *laïcité*.<sup>76</sup> In reading the signs of the times the Council recognizes a crisis of growth in human consciousness and that “in the gradual and precise unfolding of the laws of social living [people] are uncertain about how to plot its course” and that “if there is a growing

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<sup>74</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* Article 2.

<sup>75</sup> GS Art. 3.

<sup>76</sup> For the purposes of this essay, I consider the principle of *laïcité* as the current end-product of the long evolutionary relationship between Church and State culminating in the “Peace of Westphalia” in 1648 which, in turn, laid the foundations for the modern Nation-State. The principle of *laïcité* defines a place (theoretically and practically) for religion in society while respecting public order and public institutions. Vatican Council II recognized the autonomy and independence of civil society stating that the civil authority need not recognize any superior jurisdiction to itself in regulating its own affairs.



exchange of ideas, there is still a widespread disagreement in competing ideologies about the meaning of the words which express our key concepts.”<sup>77</sup> The Church and State being “competing ideologies,” I perceive a tension between them. The Church, a religious ideology, and the modern State, a secularized ideology, are two differing formalized images of Western society which autonomously govern human affairs.<sup>78</sup>

Foreshadowing a possible development from humanism (with its historical examples) to posthumanism (with its speculations about the future) the Council noted that there are developments “on the intellectual level by the mathematical, natural and human sciences and on the practical level by their repercussions on technology.”<sup>79</sup> This insight is proving to be significant given the many and various studies in posthumanism and transhumanism appearing within the literature of science fiction. The Council further acknowledged that “in many places it is not only in philosophical terms that such trends are expressed, there are signs of them in literature, art, the humanities, the interpretation of history and even civil law: all of which is very disturbing to many people.”

<sup>80</sup> But the principle of *laïcité*, when correctly understood, need not

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<sup>77</sup> GS Art. 4.

<sup>78</sup> In my view, as images in Western society, Church and State hide their ideologies. The Church, in its relations with the State, conceals an ideology of a modified Christendom to which it hopes to return. The State, on the other hand, seeks the secularity of a neutral entity through ideologies concealed in the contemporary entertainment industry, the mass Media and global politics.

<sup>79</sup> GS Art. 5.

<sup>80</sup> GS Art. 7.

be disturbing to the religiously faithful. With more emphasis on an insightful philosophical understanding and less emphasis on a partisan political understanding the application of the principle of *laïcité* can have a positive outcome from both the perspective of the Church and of the State. As I hope to show, the principle of *laïcité* interpreted from the philosophical perspective evident in *Gaudium et Spes* can protect the faithful from disturbances within the faith and lessen civil strife over religious differences within the larger community.

In Western civilization there is a need for an appropriate philosophy to serve humanity in its contemporary religious and multicultural life and serve as a preparation for a posthuman life. I suggest that an acceptance of the traditional concept of Christendom, resulting from a religious agency of cause and effect, is no longer adequate for the modern world and will most likely be questioned from philosophical and theological perspectives within a posthuman world. In the Council's words: "People are becoming conscious that the forces they have unleashed are in their own hands and that it is up to themselves to control them or be enslaved by them."<sup>81</sup> In short, I contend that God is not responsible for everything anymore. It is from this perspective that the principle of *laïcité* is to be interpreted since it is not a matter of divine revelation. Political ideologies, religious or secular, need to be supplemented

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<sup>81</sup> GS Art. 10. In this context, the visible presence of the Church and the visible presence of the State, both are signs of effective and affective existential power.

and regulated if solutions to civil strife are to be found that are truly human. Partisan politics alone will fail to secure the peace and harmony of humanity. For peace and harmony to occur “the establishment of a universally acknowledged public authority vested with the effective power to ensure security for all, regard for justice, and respect for the law” must take place.<sup>82</sup> Security may be a matter for political force, whereas, justice and law are matters of philosophical contemplation. The principle of *laïcité*, properly enacted, has the potential to point the way to justice for all.

Quoting the Hebrew scriptures to affirm the divine origin of humanity, the Council employs the phrase “the image of God” in *Gaudium et Spes*. Yet, I find it a philosophical curiosity that it omits the clause “and in our likeness” in its wording.<sup>83</sup> Does this omission suggest an intention on the part of the Council to direct theologians away from considering a status for humanity that may be greater than a mere image? Within the Western philosophical perspective “image” and “likeness” are distinguished. The term “likeness” connotes a sense of a *divine quality* that the term “image,” with its roots in sense experience lacks, according to Ledger Wood.<sup>84</sup> Thus, as I see it, the Hebrew text, by employing both terms, removes the possibility of concluding that God was dependent upon any previous image in creating humanity, but the image of himself. But that is a

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<sup>82</sup> GS Art. 82.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Gen. I: 26-27.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Ledger Wood, s. v. “Image” in *Dictionary of Philosophy: Ancient, Medieval and Modern* (Ed. Dagobert Runes 1963) Littlefield Adams.

thought worthy of development in another discussion among linguists, philosophers, and theologians.

Human dignity, or ennoblement, was traditionally understood by theologians to pertain exclusively to the intellect and moral consciousness as one law characterizing an individual human being, setting it apart from the brute. The Council's words follow that tradition concerning individual human beings; "their dignity rests in observing this law, and by it they will be judged."<sup>85</sup> In short, dignity (ennoblement) was attached to the unique mental qualities of the human being which thus set it apart. However, in modern times, the Council noted that "there is a growing awareness of the sublime dignity of human persons, who stand above all things and whose rights and duties are universal and inviolable."<sup>86</sup> Thus, dignity (ennoblement) became understood as constitutive of the individual being itself (male or female) as a human person, and not simply as a human quality reflecting a superior intellect and consciousness.<sup>87</sup>

Acknowledged in the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*, is a unique intellectual development within Christendom, i.e., atheism and its relative, anti-theism. Both, in the mind of the Church, prevent humanity attaining the "the noble state to which it was born."<sup>88</sup> And yet, from a Christian perspective the faithful must be atheists *vis-à-*

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<sup>85</sup> GS Art. 16.

<sup>86</sup> GS Art. 26.

<sup>87</sup> It is to be noted that from a Western philosophical and legal perspective, not all human beings are human persons. Being and personhood are not to be equated.

<sup>88</sup> GS Art. 21.

vis all other gods appearing in the natural and unredeemed order. The Council is correct in deploring the discrimination between believers and unbelievers which some civil authorities unjustly continue to promote, especially through a misunderstanding of the principle of *laïcité*.<sup>89</sup> The Council seeks both the betterment of the person and the improvement of society. While both are significant in the church's teaching in *Gaudium et Spes*, they are not equivalent, but dependent upon each other. "The social order and its development must constantly yield to the good of the person, since the order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons and not the other way around," the document states.<sup>90</sup> I hope to show, then, that properly understood the principle of *laïcité* has both the good of the faithful and the good of the citizenry as a goal. Freed from the fetters of State responsibility, the faithful can then truly preach the gospel without the interference of earthly ambitions of empire. Such autonomy, if ever realized, will carry with it a responsibility to fashion a just and fair human culture in the global order. As the Council noted: "To help individuals to carry out more carefully their obligations in conscience towards themselves and

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<sup>89</sup> Understood correctly the principle of *laïcité* does not require believers to become unbelievers. As a French text expresses it: *La laïcité garantit aux croyants et aux non-croyants le même droit à la liberté d'expression de leurs croyances ou convictions. Elle assure aussi bien le droit d'avoir ou de ne pas avoir de religion, d'en changer ou de ne plus en avoir. Elle garantit le libre exercice des cultes et la liberté de religion, mais aussi la liberté vis-à-vis de la religion: personne ne peut être contraint au respect de dogmes ou prescriptions religieuses.* [<https://www.gouvernement.fr/qu-est-ce-que-la-laicite>] (accessed 11 Oct. 2022).

<sup>90</sup> GS Art. 26.

towards the various groups to which they belong, they must be carefully educated to a higher degree of culture,” which is required for service to the community at large, believers and unbelievers alike.<sup>91</sup>

This task of carrying out obligations in conscience in the social order of humanity is to be accomplished by believers in the light of revelation, according to the Council. That is to say that in the social order of humanity the believer is co-agent with God. The community of global humanity “now produces by its own enterprise many things which in former times it expected would come largely from heavenly powers.”<sup>92</sup> Philosophically, then, the human intellect operating within a “higher degree of culture” discloses itself as a cooperative “creative agency” within humanity. This, creative agency is not reserved to God alone. Adopting this philosophical and theological perspective signals a significant shift in the church’s self-understanding in the modern world. It is to be further noted that a human creative agency in earthly affairs does not exclude the presence of God within earthly affairs, according to the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*. Rather, a co-creative relationship between humanity and God is envisioned by the framers of the document. That is to say that in light of this document’s pastoral intention I interpret the Council’s teaching on material creation such that the human person (as being composed of matter and spirit) is part of material creation, albeit a unique part, and with a particular

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<sup>91</sup> GS Art. 31.

<sup>92</sup> GS Art. 33.

responsibility for fashioning the rest of creation. This philosophical insight has great implications for posthuman understanding considering the advancement of techno-digital science. “By the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws. These, as the methods proper to every science and technique must be respected.”<sup>93</sup> It appears that the traditional understanding that “persons are in the world, but not of the world” will require a philosophical re-assessment.

As I interpret Chapter IV of *Gaudium et Spes*, it opens with a significant paragraph intended as an introduction to Part II of the Constitution.

All we have said up to now about the dignity of the human person, the community of men and women, and the deep significance of human activity, provides a basis for discussing the relationship between the church and the world and the dialogue between them. The council now intends to consider the presence of the church in the world, and its life and activity there, in the light of what it has already declared about the mystery of the church.<sup>94</sup>

Philosophically, it is worth noting that the “world” (composed of ethnic social realities – often recognized as Nation-States) formally and informally undertakes its own discussion with the church (a

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<sup>93</sup> GS Art. 36.

<sup>94</sup> GS Art. 40.

transnational social reality).<sup>95</sup> To my mind, this discussion presents an opportunity for philosophers and politicians to re-consider the principle of *laïcité* within a dialogue between Church and State from a contemporary philosophical perspective. From a political perspective, the current political dialogue between Church (the faithful) and State (the citizenry) is not between equal partners, nor is it undertaken in a spirit of cooperation, but often is one of confrontation and lack of trust. Suggesting a contrary view, the Council emphasizes that,

by its nature and mission the church is universal in that it is not committed to any one culture or to any political, economic or social system. Hence, it can form a very close bond among the various communities of people and nations, provided they trust the church and guarantee it true freedom to carry out its mission. ... The church desires nothing more ardently than that it should develop in freedom in the service of all, under any regime which recognizes the basic rights of

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<sup>95</sup> Not all nations are States. However, the modern notion of the Nation-State is likely to remain a political reality for well into the future of global administration. It is currently the primary model for political territorial organization and the agent for the optional use of coercive political power. In current understanding many statesmen and politicians hold that political identity belongs to the State and cultural identity belongs to the Nation. National cultural identity is characterized by personal intimacy and the plurality of communities. Political identity is characterized by minimal personal intimacy and a tendency to uniformity in community organization.



the person and the family, and the requirements of the common good.<sup>96</sup>

To my mind, this understanding of cultural independence and the common good is appropriate for the relationship between Church and State and is compatible with a proper understanding of the principle of *laïcité* and its emphasis on freedom for all. This compatibility deserves encouragement from all people who understand rapid social and cultural change. Further, the Church admits that it is open to receiving something from the world. The Pastoral Constitution reads: “Nowadays when things change so rapidly and thought patterns differ so widely, the church needs to step up this exchange by calling upon the help of people who are living in the world, who are expert in its organizations and its forms of training, and who understand its mentality, in the case of believers and non-believers alike.”<sup>97</sup>

After treating specifically of the family, love and marriage the Council considers the development of certain cultural issues stating that, “whenever, therefore, there is a question of human life, nature and culture are intimately linked together” such that “one is entitled to speak of a new age of human history; hence new ways are opened up for the development and diffusion of culture.”<sup>98</sup> The principle of

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<sup>96</sup> GS Art. 42. A further development of this theme may be found in the article by Móses Nóda, “A Paradigm Shift in the Catholic Church: Recognizing Religious Freedom and Secular Autonomy” in the *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 17, issue 50 (Summer 2018) 63-78. ISSN: 1583-0039.

<sup>97</sup> GS Art. 44.

<sup>98</sup> GS Art. 53 & 54.

*laïcité*, then, properly understood as a modern philosophical and sociological principle belongs to the development and diffusion of culture, as I interpret the Council's pastoral intent. As a philosophical principle *laïcité* transcends mere political opinion. As a French text states: La laïcité n'est pas une opinion parmi d'autres mais la liberté d'en avoir une. Elle n'est pas une conviction mais le principe qui les autorise toutes, sous réserve du respect de l'ordre public.<sup>99</sup> The Council continues its understanding: "In pastoral care sufficient use should be made, not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially psychology and sociology: in this way the faithful will be brought to a purer and more mature living of the faith."<sup>100</sup>

*Laïcité*, is an intellectual concept arising out of the philosophical mentality of the Nation-State, often simply known as the State. Philosophically, the State itself is a human intellectual and normative construct originating in the science that pertains to the organization of social goals.<sup>101</sup> The language of *Gaudium et Spes*, does not speak of the State as a substantive reality, but rather as a representation and regulator of a concrete social, political and civic community. The Constitution reads, "the choice of the political regime and the appointment of rulers are left to the free decision of the citizens. It follows that political authority, either within the political community as such or through organizations representing

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<sup>99</sup> [<https://www.gouvernement.fr/qu-est-ce-que-la-laicite>]

<sup>100</sup> GS Art. 62.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. James K. Feibleman, in *Dictionary of Philosophy: Ancient, Medieval and Modern* s. v. Politics (Ed. Dagobert Runes 1963) Littlefield Adams.

the State, must be exercised within the limits of the moral order and directed towards the common good,” which citizens are bound to obey in conscience.<sup>102</sup> In short, from a philosophical perspective, the mind of the Council is that the State is an abstract and changeable ideological concept constituted by political regimes. In light of this philosophical inquiry, the following makes sense in the contemporary context. “The political community [defined by State boundaries] and the church [characterized as transcending State boundaries] are autonomous and independent of each other in their own fields. They are both at the service of the personal and social vocation of the same individuals, though under different titles.”<sup>103</sup> Therefore, to my mind, it is curious that these titles of “Church” and “State” lead to a confrontational, rather than a cooperative relationship. As I see it, the content of *Gaudium et Spes*, and the principle of *laïcité* raise philosophical issues inviting a reinterpretation of the relationship of the Church and State that will likely continue to concern the faithful and the citizenry well into a posthuman world.

I now turn to the philosophical self-conception of the church in the modern world with an eye to the church’s possible posthuman reality. In Part II I discuss the principle of *laïcité vis-à-vis* ecclesial self-conception, but first a few background remarks are necessary.

The Vatican II documents that define the norms for a modern ecclesiology present a new model for defining the separation of

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<sup>102</sup> GS Art. 74.

<sup>103</sup> GS Art. 76.

Church and State that is more in accord with contemporary and future philosophical perspectives. In interpreting this new model, I follow a Continental philosophical approach in preference to an American or analytical approach. That is to say, the meanings I assign to terms and concepts will sometimes vary significantly from those understood and accepted by philosophers familiar only with American philosophy. As an example, American “civil rights” translates into Continental “public freedoms.” These freedoms are not natural to the individual human being, but are acquired, and are not to be used against the State which has initiated and guards them. The State properly defines and limits a human freedom to be enjoyed by an individual, subject to the legitimate authority of law. In short, public freedoms are acquired through the human process of law. They are not inherent in the human existential condition. Further, such freedoms are not realized as “God given rights” but are realized by cooperating with the State and not by opposing the State.<sup>104</sup>

Historically, in the West two dominant political models have been used to describe the relationship between Church and State. The first is caesaropapism, the political model, whereby the religious authority is absolutely subordinated to the State. This is the most common model in the history of Western civilization. The second political model is that of the theocratic State, often

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<sup>104</sup> In Thomas Jefferson’s famous words of wisdom, that “all men are created equal, ... they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights ... Life, liberty, and Happiness;” the Creator is no longer seen by many contemporary sages and philosophers as having actually endowed these unalienable rights.

theologically and philosophically nuanced. It is territorially organized whereby the religious authority is independent and often dominates the State authority. Culturally, it is an older model than the Western model. As either model evolves from the postmodern to posthuman era, religious power ought not to be a consequence of the legislation of the State, I would hold. As part of the definition of the modern State the political authority possesses a monopoly over the use of force and its legitimate use over its citizens. The modern understanding is also reflected in the separation of Church and State expressed in the form of a Concordat as the type of State policy with respect to the Catholic religion. The modern Concordat, in fact, amounts to a religious ideology *vis-à-vis* a state ideology, with each independent and autonomous in its own realm. In this essay I accept that perspective and in Part II I focus on the principle of *laïcité* and how the Church conceives itself.

## PART II

### Ecclesial Self-Conception and *Laïcité*.

In this part of the essay, I discuss some clues buried in the two documents, (*Ad Gentes Divinitus*) “The Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity” and (*Dignitatis Humanae*) “The Declaration on Religious Liberty” as revealing a proper understanding of the principle of *laïcité* from the Church’s perspective. In the relationship between the Church and State, the Church is not an equal partner as was noted above since the Church is not a modern State in any sense of the word. The Church conceives itself as a community of

believers united in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, and founded upon the apostles.<sup>105</sup> Thus, the principles of missionary activity are not expressed in a political language of a state, but in a theological and philosophical language of a hierarchical community. However, concerning the Second Vatican Council, Robert Adolfs insightfully notes that

essentially, the Council was little more than a professional discussion between administrators of the Church, but popular imagination turned it into a spiritual rebirth of the Church. ... But the real limitation of the Council was this — it was in principle an affair of the clergy.<sup>106</sup>

Plus, from my perspective, the Council acted as if it constituted a modern State. Although not always evident, in particular situations, a state-like self-understanding may be recognized in the norms of missionary activity as giving effect to the stages of God's agenda.

Although the church possesses in itself the totality and fullness of the means of salvation, it does not always, in fact cannot, use every one of them immediately, but it has to make beginnings and work by slow stages to give effect to God's plan.<sup>107</sup>

In short, the Church in the modern world shares its agency with God. Whether God's plan is "fixed" or is open to development in

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<sup>105</sup> *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* (MA) Para. 1

<sup>106</sup> Adolfs, Robert (1966:9) *The Grave of God* Harper & Row.

<sup>107</sup> MA Para. 6.

cooperation with humans remains a debateable philosophical issue. I favour the latter, open view to missionary development.

Missionary activity implants the structure of a collegiate hierarchy, characteristic of the church universal, in the nations of the world. However, this hierarchy is conceived as an administrative authority in the world-wide communion minus any territory traditionally characteristic of a modern State. The exception, of course, is the Vatican City State administered by this same authority whose head of State is the Pope. Thus, one could argue that in the modern world there are two socially organized representatives of the church, i.e., the universal Christian community and a particular city state, i.e., the Vatican. This distinction is significant for a proper understanding of the civic principle of *laïcité*. The universal ecclesial community is composed of individuals within creation displaying a Christian human nature. This perspective contrasts with the modern State which conceives of no particular human status except that of the citizen who is deemed “equal” within its boundaries, i.e., no one is above its law. Thus, within modern philosophy, “Church vs State” could be re-phrased as “Christian human nature” (subject to God) vs “egalitarian human nature” subject to no authority above the State. Thus, in contemporary global society the question arises, what is the status of the Christian understanding of human nature in a State espousing the principle of *laïcité*? In interpreting this question, confrontation is better replaced by cooperation, since Christian and secular philosophical

perspectives both seek the advancement of the person and its environment in the modern world.

The Council stated that while interested in its status within the State, “the church, nevertheless, has no desire to become involved in the government of the temporal order,”<sup>108</sup> which would thus free it from competing with the civil authority, as I interpret it. However, the lay Christian faithful, (distinguished from the hierarchical faithful) have a particular task to fill in missionary activity.

The laity, that is Christians who have been incorporated into Christ and live in the world, are of primary importance and worthy of special attention. It is for them, imbued with the Spirit of Christ, to be a leaven animating and directing the temporal order from within, so that everything is always carried out in accordance with the will of Christ.<sup>109</sup>

The laity are thus assigned the responsibility for the regulation of the temporal order, or that of its polity. Therefore, Christians, within an egalitarian human community, may organize themselves along norms characteristic of a civic state as evidenced in this Decree on Missionary Activity. The assembly of the faithful constitutes a social life which has a stability and permanence and its own officials as leaders (priests) who are subject to an overseer (a bishop). Thus, lay people living within the boundaries of a State are to establish an order of love and justice by means of apostolic and civil action

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<sup>108</sup> MA Para. 12.

<sup>109</sup> MA Para. 15.



“embodied in suitable canonical legislation.”<sup>110</sup> The hierarchy for its part appears to have a different role within the Church. “Bishops and priests must think and live with the universal church, becoming more and more imbued with a sense of Christ and the church.”<sup>111</sup> As I interpret it, the principle of *laïcité* only pertains to lay Christians since the hierarchy has already excluded itself from temporal affairs. This fact is further reinforced by the Decree when it states that

the church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy. ... The lay faithful belong fully to the people of God and civil society. They belong to the nation into which they were born.<sup>112</sup>

In its present structure, one aspect of the church is organized in a way that mirrors the structure of the modern secular State, yet without being a State. The overseeing body of the missionary organization is the office of the Propagation of the Faith which functions as coordinator of ecclesial activity throughout the world. Following the contemporary conciliar pattern of the church’s self-conception, the Decree notes that

this congregation should be both an instrument of administration and an organ of dynamic direction, that it should use scientific methods and instruments adapted to

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<sup>110</sup> MA Para. 19.

<sup>111</sup> MA Para. 19.

<sup>112</sup> MA Para. 21.

modern conditions, that it be guided by present-day research in theology, methodology and pastoral missionary work.<sup>113</sup>

Notably absent is the specification of the role of philosophy in the church's orientation towards the future in which religion and science will most likely dominate human culture for some time. In other words, there is no official philosophy recognized by the Church. Similarly, while the Vatican is recognized as the official political headquarters of the institutional Church, theoretically, as a city-state, its location could be elsewhere than in Italy. It seems, however, that classical philosophy, although unofficial, continues to suffice for ecclesial matters according to the view of the Council Fathers and achieves the good of the missions and the good of the church at large. But, from my perspective, an appropriate change in philosophical thinking may be envisioned as humanity evolves towards a posthuman stage. Such a change in philosophical thinking will no doubt have a profound effect on the relationship between Church and State.

“The Declaration on Religious Liberty” also reflects modern notions in accord with the principle of a contemporary notion of *laïcité* as promoted by the State. This Declaration notes that people today “demand constitutional limitation of the powers of government” when responsible freedom, ecclesial or civil, is exercised within their community.<sup>114</sup> As I read the signs of the times, the following paragraph from the Declaration would receive

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<sup>113</sup> MA Para. 29.

<sup>114</sup> *Declaration on Religious Liberty* (RL) Para. 1.

little, if any, objection from the promoters of the contemporary principle of *laïcité*.

The Vatican council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. Freedom of this kind means that everyone should be immune from coercion by individuals, social groups and every human power so that, within due limits, no men or women are forced to act against their convictions nor are any persons to be restrained from acting in accordance with their convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in association with others. ... This right of the human person to religious freedom must be given such recognition in the constitutional order of society as will make it a civil right.<sup>115</sup>

Besides religious freedom, among civil rights (public freedoms) is the expectation by citizens to be free from any civil strife caused by the differences of belief or culture among religious bodies. The principle of *laïcité* seeks harmony within the State by regulating the signs of religious belief, or convictions, and their exposure by citizens authorized by the State to exercise legitimate power. An analysis of Western history shows that a combination of power and religious conviction often leads to an abuse of power and a debasing of religious conviction with the subsequent engendering of civil strife. The Council admits that civil society has a right to protect itself from abuses committed in the name of religious conviction.

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<sup>115</sup> RL Para. 2

Such protection is dependent upon the civil authority establishing norms that

are necessary for the effective protection of the rights of all citizens and for the peaceful settlement of the conflicts of rights. They are also necessary for the adequate protection of that just public peace which is to be found where people live together in good order and true justice. ... All these matters are basic to the common good and belong to what is called the public order.<sup>116</sup>

To my mind, in the modern world and in anticipation of a posthuman world, the Faithful need to befriend the State and the Citizenry need to understand, not only the Church, but all religious societies.

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<sup>116</sup> RL Para. 7.